A Casebook on OTHELLO

Edited by

Leonard F. Dean

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A Casebook on *Othello*

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A Casebook on *Othello*

EDITED BY LEONARD F. DEAN

University of Connecticut

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Preface

This book presents an annotated text of Shakespeare's *Othello,* fourteen essays on the play and two essays on tragedy, a new translation of Cinthio's story, the supposed source of the play, and suggestions for study, discussion, and writing. It was designed to serve teachers and students of literature, of literary criticism, of the theater, and of expository writing. For the student of literature who is aiming to read imaginative writing with greater fullness and accuracy, the essays will in effect enlarge the discussion of *Othello* which he carries on with himself and his classmates. The teacher, too, may find it stimulating to have a Rymer, a Shaw, or a Heilman in class. For the student of literary criticism the essays represent two hundred and fifty years of changing critical methods and perspectives, all brought to bear on a concrete major literary work, *Othello,* and a major literary genre, tragedy. To enlarge the critical background, four of the essays analyze notable performances of *Othello* and discuss difficulties and rewards of producing the play. For the student of expository writing, the play and accompanying essays constitute a casebook or small, selected research library through which topics can be traced and arguments examined and correlated.

It is perhaps best, for whatever purpose the book is used, to begin with the play. The reader will then come to the essays armed with his own impressions and reactions. The two general essays on tragedy may be usefully read either first or last, but the critical essays on *Othello* should probably be read the first time through in roughly chronological order (as they are presented here), since later essays tend to develop the ideas of their predecessors or argue against them. That relationship is pointed up at the end of this book in the editor's notes on the authors and their essays. The questions on the criticism

attempt to bring out major ideas and raise problems for discussion and papers. The final suggestions for writing describe some of the larger topics arising from this collection which are suitable for so-called controlled research papers.

Bracketed figures in the essays indicate the end of the page on which the selection appeared in the original source. If a page of the original ended with a hyphenated word, the page number here precedes the word.

I am indebted to students, colleagues, and other friends with whom I have discussed *Othello* and Shakespearean criticism, and to the authors and the publishers of the essays reprinted here.

LEONARD F. DEAN

Storrs, Connecticut

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The Tragedy of Othello

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The major sources of any text of *Othello* are an individual printing in a quarto of 1622 (Q), and the first folio of 1623 (F), in which about half of Shakespeare's plays were printed for the first time. The text printed here, like most modern editions, is based on F with some readings from Q. Except for oaths (which were deleted from F, presumably because of an act of Parliament of 1606 forbidding profanity in plays), Q is somewhat shorter and often poetically tamer than F. Sizable readings from Q are printed here in brackets, and differences between the two texts which may repay discussion have been indicated in the notes. Spelling and punctuation have been largely modernized. The line numbering of the Globe text has been used in order to facilitate reference to Bartlett's *Concordance* and other standard works. Shakespeare's plays printed before his death (1616) were not divided into acts and scenes, but for *Othello* Q has headings for Acts II, IV, and V, and F has all of the act and scene divisions customary since the eighteenth century except for II. iii. Place of action was not indicated originally except in the dialogue, and stage directions in Q and F are few compared to modern practice. This all implies that the artistic structure of a Shakespearean play may well differ from that indicated by modern act and scene divisions, which are related to the proscenium stage with its intermissions rather than to the neutral Elizabethan platform stage with its nearly continuous action. *Othello* was apparently written shortly after *Hamlet*, and the first recorded performance is 1 November 1604.

Characters

OTHELLO
A noble Moor serving as military commander for the Venetian state.

BRABANTIO
Venetian senator and Desdemona's father.

CASSIO
A lieutenant, Othello's first officer.

IAGO
An ancient (ensign), Othello's second officer.

RODERIGO
Venetian gentleman.

DUKE OF VENICE

MONTANO
Othello's predecessor as governor of Cyprus.

GRATIANO
Brabantio's brother.

LODOVICO
Kinsman of Brabantio.

DESDEMONA
Daughter of Brabantio and wife of Othello.

EMILIA
Wife of Iago.

BIANCA
A courtesan, Cassio's mistress.

Senators, Gentlemen, Officers, Sailors, Servant, Messenger, Herald, Musicians, Attendants.

The Tragedy of Othello

THE MOOR OF VENICE

Act I. Scene i.

Enter Roderigo and Iago.

RODERIGO. Tush, never tell me! I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.
IAGO. 'Sblood, but you will not hear me!
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me.
RODERIGO. Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.
IAGO. Despise me if I do not. Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped to him; and, by the faith of man,
I know my price; I am worth no worse a place.
But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them with a bombast circumstance.
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war;
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, 'Certes,' says he,
'I have already chose my officer.'
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine
(A fellow almost damned in a fair wife)

I. i. 13. bombast circumstance: (cotton stuffing detail), evasive big talk.
16. Nonsuits: refuses.
19. arithmetician: person full of merely bookish military knowledge.
21. damned . . . wife: proverbial saying; since Cassio is not married in the play (though he is in the play's source), *wife* may mean *woman*, and refer to someone like Bianca.

That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoric,
Wherein the togèd consuls can propose
As masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th' election;
And I (of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds
Christian and heathen) must be belee'd and calmed
By debitor and creditor; this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship's ancient.

RODERIGO. By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.

IAGO. Why, there's no remedy; 'tis the curse of service.
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
And not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to th' first. Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor.

RODERIGO. I would not follow him then.

IAGO. O, sir, content you;
I follow him to serve my turn upon him.
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
For naught but provender; and when he's old, cashiered.
Whip me such honest knaves! Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves;
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them, and when they have lined their coats,
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.
In following him, I follow but myself;

24. Spinster: a spinner of thread, not necessarily female.
31. counter-caster: desk-bound soldier.
36. affection: emotional preference.

Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end;
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at; I am not what I am.

RODERIGO. What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe
If he can carry't thus!

IAGO. Call up her father,
Rouse him. Make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,
And though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies; though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't
As it may lose some color.

RODERIGO. Here is her father's house. I'll call aloud.

IAGO. Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

RODERIGO. What, ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho!

IAGO. Awake! What, ho, Brabantio! Thieves! thieves! thieves!
Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!
Thieves! thieves!

Brabantio at a window.

BRABANTIO. (*above*) What is the reason of this terrible summons?
What is the matter there?

RODERIGO. Signior, is all your family within?

IAGO. Are your doors locked?

BRABANTIO. Why, wherefore ask you this?

IAGO. Zounds, sir, y'are robbed! For shame, put on your gown!
Your heart is burst; you have lost half your soul.
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise!
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,

60. peculiar: personal.
63. compliment extern: external appearance.
66. owe: own. 75. timorous: terrifying.
89. tupping: from *tup,* a ram. 90. snorting: snoring.

Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.
Arise, I say!

BRABANTIO. What, have you lost your wits?

RODERIGO. Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?

BRABANTIO. Not I. What are you?

RODERIGO. My name is Roderigo.

BRABANTIO. The worser welcome!
I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors.
In honest plainness thou hast heard me say
My daughter is not for thee; and now, in madness,
Being full of supper and distemp'ring draughts,
Upon malicious bravery dost thou come
To start my quiet.

RODERIGO. Sir, sir, sir—

BRABANTIO. But thou must needs be sure
My spirit and my place have in them power
To make this bitter to thee.

RODERIGO. Patience, good sir.

BRABANTIO. What tell'st thou me of robbing? This is Venice;
My house is not a grange.

RODERIGO. Most grave Brabantio,
In simple and pure soul I come to you.

IAGO. Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not serve God if the devil bid you. Because we come to do you service, and you think we are ruffians, you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have coursers for cousins, and gennets for germans.

BRABANTIO. What profane wretch art thou?

IAGO. I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.

BRABANTIO. Thou art a villain.

IAGO. You are—a senator.

BRABANTIO. This thou shalt answer. I know thee, Roderigo.

RODERIGO. Sir, I will answer anything. But I beseech you,
If't be your pleasure and most wise consent,
As partly I find it is, that your fair daughter,

100. bravery: bravado. 101. start: disturb.
106. grange: isolated farmhouse. 112. nephews: grandsons.
113. gennets for germans: Moorish horses for near relatives.

At this odd-even and dull watch o' th' night,
Transported, with no worse nor better guard
But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier,
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor—
If this be known to you, and your allowance,
We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs;
But if you know not this, my manners tell me
We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe
That, from the sense of all civility,
I thus would play and trifle with your reverence.
Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
I say again, hath made a gross revolt,
Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and everywhere. Straight satisfy yourself.
If she be in her chamber, or your house,
Let loose on me the justice of the state
For thus deluding you.

BRABANTIO. Strike on the tinder, ho!
Give me a taper! Call up all my people!
This accident is not unlike my dream.
Belief of it oppresses me already.
Light, I say! light! *Exit* [*above*].

IAGO. Farewell, for I must leave you.
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place,
To be produced—as, if I stay, I shall—
Against the Moor. For I do know the state,
However this may gall him with some check,
Cannot with safety cast him; for he's embarked
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stand in act, that for their souls
Another of his fathom they have none
To lead their business; in which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains,
Yet, for necessity of present life,

124. odd-even: between midnight and one. 129. saucy: insolent.
132. from the sense of: contrary to.
137. extravagant: wandering, footloose. 143. accident: event.
149. check: rebuke. 150. cast: dismiss.
152. stand in act: are in progress. 153. fathom: caliber.

I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find him,
Lead to the Sagittary the raisèd search;
And there will I be with him. So farewell. *Exit.*

Enter, [below,] Brabantio, and Servants with torches.

BRABANTIO. It is too true an evil. Gone she is;
And what's to come of my despisèd time
Is naught but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her?—O unhappy girl!—
With the Moor, say'st thou?—Who would be a father?—
How didst thou know 'twas she?—O, she deceives me
Past thought!—What said she to you?—Get more tapers!
Raise all my kindred!—Are they married, think you?
RODERIGO. Truly I think they are.
BRABANTIO. O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act. Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing?
RODERIGO. Yes, sir, I have indeed.
BRABANTIO. Call up my brother.—O, would you had had her!—
Some one way, some another.—Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor?
RODERIGO. I think I can discover him, if you please
To get good guard and go along with me.
BRABANTIO. Pray you lead on. At every house I'll call;
I may command at most.—Get weapons, ho!
And raise some special officers of night.—
On, good Roderigo; I'll deserve your pains. *Exeunt.*

Scene ii.

Enter Othello, Iago, and Attendants with torches.

IAGO. Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' th' conscience

159. Sagittary: probably an inn. 173. property: normal nature.
184. deserve: repay.

To do no contrived murther. I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service. Nine or ten times
I had thought t' have yerked him here under the ribs.
OTHELLO. 'Tis better as it is.
IAGO. Nay, but he prated,
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
Against your honor
That with the little godliness I have
I did full hard forbear him. But I pray you, sir,
Are you fast married? Be assured of this,
That the magnifico is much beloved,
And hath in his effect a voice potential
As double as the duke's. He will divorce you,
Or put upon you what restraint and grievance
The law, with all his might to enforce it on,
Will give him cable.
OTHELLO. Let him do his spite.
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know—
Which, when I know that boasting is an honor,
I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached. For know, Iago,
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhousèd free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth.

Enter Cassio, Officers, with torches.

But look, what lights come yond?
IAGO. Those are the raisèd father and his friends.
You were best go in.
OTHELLO. Not I; I must be found.

I. ii. 5. yerked: stabbed. 10. full hard forbear: barely spare.
12. magnifico: Venetian nobleman (Barbantio).
13–14. voice . . . double: influence so strong it is like two votes.
18. signiory: Venetian government. 19. yet to know: still not known.
22. siege: rank.
22–4. demerits . . . reached: merits are equal to those I have reached by my position and marriage here.

My parts, my title, and my perfect soul
Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?
IAGO. By Janus, I think no.
OTHELLO. The servants of the duke, and my lieutenant.
The goodness of the night upon you, friends!
What is the news?
CASSIO. The duke does greet you, general;
And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance
Even on the instant.
OTHELLO. What's the matter, think you?
CASSIO. Something from Cyprus, as I may divine.
It is a business of some heat. The galleys
Have sent a dozen sequent messengers
This very night at one another's heels,
And many of the consuls, raised and met,
Are at the duke's already. You have been hotly called for;
When, being not at your lodging to be found,
The Senate hath sent about three several quests
To search you out.
OTHELLO. 'Tis well I am found by you.
I will but spend a word here in the house,
And go with you. [*Exit.*]
CASSIO. Ancient, what makes he here?
IAGO. Faith, he to-night hath boarded a land carack.
If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever.
CASSIO. I do not understand.
IAGO. He's married.
CASSIO. To who?

[*Enter Othello.*]

IAGO. Marry, to—Come, captain, will you go?
OTHELLO. Have with you.
CASSIO. Here comes another troop to seek for you.

Enter Brabantio, Roderigo, and others with lights and weapons.

IAGO. It is Brabantio. General, be advised.
He comes to bad intent.

31. parts . . . title . . . perfect soul: personal qualities, legal right, clear conscience.
41. sequent: successive. 50. carack: treasure ship.

OTHELLO. Holla! stand there!
RODERIGO. Signior, it is the Moor.
BRABANTIO. Down with him, thief!
[*They draw on both sides.*]
IAGO. You, Roderigo! Come, sir, I am for you.
OTHELLO. Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
Good signior, you shall more command with years
Than with your weapons.
BRABANTIO. O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?
Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her!
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, t' incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weaken motion. I'll have't disputed on;
'Tis probable, and palpable to thinking.
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
For an abuser of the world, a practicer
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.
Lay hold upon him. If he do resist,
Subdue him at his peril.
OTHELLO. Hold your hands,
Both you of my inclining and the rest.
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter. Where will you that I go
To answer this your charge?
BRABANTIO. To prison, till fit time
Of law and course of direct session
Call thee to answer.

72. gross in sense: obvious.
75. weaken motion: act as a narcotic. disputed on: argued in court.
77. attach: arrest.
79. inhibited . . . warrant: illegal (i.e., black magic).

OTHELLO. What if I do obey?
How may the duke be therewith satisfied,
Whose messengers are here about my side
Upon some present business of the state
To bring me to him?
OFFICER. 'Tis true, most worthy signior.
The duke's in council, and your noble self
I am sure is sent for.
BRABANTIO. How? The duke in council?
In this time of the night? Bring him away.
Mine's not an idle cause. The duke himself,
Or any of my brothers of the state,
Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own;
For if such actions may have passage free,
Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be. *Exeunt.*

SCENE iii.

Enter Duke and Senators, set at a table, with lights and Attendants.

DUKE. There is no composition in these news
That gives them credit.
1. SENATOR. Indeed they are disproportioned.
My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.
DUKE. And mine a hundred forty.
2. SENATOR. And mine two hundred.
But though they jump not on a just account—
As in these cases where the aim reports
'Tis oft with difference—yet do they all confirm
A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.
DUKE. Nay, it is possible enought to judgment.
I do not so secure me in the error
But the main article I do approve
In fearful sense.
SAILOR. (*within*) What, ho! what, ho! what, ho!
OFFICER. A messenger from the galleys.

I. iii. 1. composition: consistency. 5. jump: agree.
6. aim reports: reports based on conjecture.
10. secure . . . error: rely on the inconsistencies.

Enter Sailor.

DUKE. Now, what's the business?
SAILOR. The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes.
So was I bid report here to the state
By Signior Angelo.
DUKE. How say you by this change?
1. SENATOR. This cannot be
By no assay of reason. 'Tis a pageant
To keep us in false gaze. When we consider
Th' importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,
And let ourselves again but understand
That, as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
So may he with more facile question bear it,
For that it stands not in such warlike brace,
But altogether lacks th' abilities
That Rhodes is dressed in—if we make thought of this,
We must not think the Turk is so unskillful
To leave that latest which concerns him first,
Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain
To wake and wage a danger profitless.
DUKE. Nay, in all confidence he's not for Rhodes.
OFFICER. Here is more news.

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER. The Ottomites, reverend and gracious,
Steering with due course toward the isle of Rhodes,
Have there injointed them with an after fleet.
1. SENATOR. Ay, so I thought. How many, as you guess?
MESSENGER. Of thirty sail; and now they do restem
Their backward course, bearing with frank appearance
Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signior Montano,
Your trusty and most valiant servitor,
With his free duty recommends you thus,
And prays you to believe him.
DUKE. 'Tis certain then for Cyprus.
Marcus Luccicos, is not he in town?
1. SENATOR. He's now in Florence.
DUKE. Write from us to him; post, post-haste dispatch.

18. assay: test. 23. with . . . bear: more easily capture.
24. brace: state of defence. 30. wage: risk.

Enter Barbantio, Othello, Cassio, Iago, Roderigo, and Officers.

1. SENATOR. Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor.
DUKE. Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.
[*To Brabantio*] I did not see you. Welcome, gentle signior.
We lacked your counsel and your help to-night.
BRABANTIO. So did I yours. Good your grace, pardon me.
Neither my place, nor aught I heard of business,
Hath raised me from my bed; nor doth the general care
Take hold on me; for my particular grief
Is of so floodgate and o'erbearing nature
That it engluts and swallows other sorrows,
And it is still itself.
DUKE. Why, what's the matter?
BRABANTIO. My daughter! O, my daughter!
ALL. Dead?
BRABANTIO. Ay, to me.
She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so prepost'rously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not.
DUKE. Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding
Hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself,
And you of her, the bloody book of law
You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
After your own sense; yea, though our proper son
Stood in your action.
BRABANTIO. Humbly I thank your grace.
Here is the man—this Moor, whom now, it seems,
Your special mandate for the state affairs
Hath hither brought.
ALL. We are very sorry for't.
DUKE. [*to Othello*] What, in your own part, can you say to this?
BRABANTIO. Nothing, but this is so.
OTHELLO. Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble, and approved good masters,
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,

69. our proper: my own. 70. stood in your action: faced your charge.

It is most true; true I have married her.
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech,
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest action in the tented field;
And little of this great world can I speak
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle;
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
Of my whole course of love—what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration, and what mighty magic
(For such proceeding am I charged withal)
I won his daughter.

BRABANTIO. A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blushed at herself; and she—in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything—
To fall in love with what she feared to look on!
It is a judgment maimed and most imperfect
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
To find out practices of cunning hell
Why this should be. I therefore vouch again
That with some mixtures pow'rful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram, conjured to this effect,
He wrought upon her.

DUKE. To vouch this is no proof,
Without more certain and more overt test
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods
Of modern seeming do prefer against him.

1. SENATOR. But, Othello, speak.
Did you by indirect and forcèd courses
Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?
Or came it by request, and such fair question
As soul to soul affordeth?

83. pith: strength. 85. dearest: most important.
95–6. her motion Blushed at herself: she blushed at her own feelings.
109. modern: commonplace.

OTHELLO. I do beseech you,
Send for the lady to the Sagittary
And let her speak of me before her father.
If you do find me foul in her report,
The trust, the office, I do hold of you
Not only take away, but let your sentence
Even fall upon my life.
DUKE. Fetch Desdemona hither.
OTHELLO. Ancient, conduct them; you best know the place.
Exit [*Iago, with*] *two or three* [*Attendants*].
And till she come, as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,
So justly to your grave ears I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine.
DUKE. Say it, Othello.
OTHELLO. Her father loved me, oft invited me;
Still questioned me the story of my life
From year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To th' very moment that he bade me tell it.
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field;
Of hairbreadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach;
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence
And portance in my travel's history;
Wherein of anters vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak—such was the process;
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline;
But still the house affairs would draw her thence;
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She'ld come again, and with a greedy ear

139. portance: behavior. 140. anters: caves. idle: waste and empty.
144. Anthropophagi: man-eaters.

Devour up my discourse. Which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intentively. I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs.
She swore, i' faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange;
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.
She wished she had not heard it; yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me;
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.
Here comes the lady. Let her witness it.

Enter Desdemona, Iago, Attendants.

DUKE. I think this tale would win my daughter too.
Good Brabantio,
Take up this mangled matter at the best.
Men do their broken weapons rather use
Than their bare hands.

BRABANTIO. I pray you hear her speak.
If she confess that she was half the wooer,
Destruction on my head if my bad blame
Light on the man! Come hither, gentle mistress.
Do you perceive in all this noble company
Where most you owe obedience?

DESDEMONA. My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education;
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you: you are the lord of duty;
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;

And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.

BRABANTIO. God b' wi' ye! I have done.
Please if your grace, on to the state affairs.
I had rather to adopt a child than get it.
Come hither, Moor.
I here do give thee that with all my heart
Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
I am glad at soul I have no other child;
For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.

DUKE. Let me speak like yourself and lay a sentence
Which, as a grise or step, may help these lovers
[Into your favor.]
When remedies are past, the griefs are ended
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
What cannot be preserved when fortune takes,
Patience her injury a mock'ry makes.
The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

BRABANTIO. So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile:
We lose it not so long as we can smile.
He bears the sentence well that nothing bears
But the free comfort which from thence he hears;
But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow
That to pay grief must of poor patience borrow.
These sentences, to sugar, or to gall,
Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.
But words are words. I never yet did hear
That the bruised heart was piecèd through the ear.
Beseech you, now to the affairs of state.

DUKE. The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you; and though we have there a substitute of most allowed

188. challenge: claim 199. sentence: maxim. 200. grise: step.

sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you. You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition.

OTHELLO. The tyrant custom, most grave senators,
Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war
My thrice-driven bed of down. I do agnize
A natural and prompt alacrity
I find in hardness; and do undertake
These present wars against the Ottomites.
Most humbly, therefore, bending to your state,
I crave fit disposition for my wife,
Due reference of place, and exhibition,
With such accommodation and besort
As levels with her breeding.

DUKE. If you please,
Be't at her father's.

BRABANTIO. I'll not have it so.

OTHELLO. Nor I.

DESDEMONA. Nor I. I would not there reside,
To put my father in impatient thoughts
By being in his eye. Most gracious duke,
To my unfolding lend your prosperous ear,
And let me find a charter in your voice,
To assist my simpleness . . .

DUKE. What would you, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA. That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence, and storm of fortunes,
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honors and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

232. thrice-driven: softest. agnize: recognize in myself.
238. exhibition: allowance of money. 245. prosperous: favorable.
252. very quality: Q has "utmost pleasure."

OTHELLO. Let her have your voices.
Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat—the young affects
In me defunct—and proper satisfaction;
But to be free and bounteous to her mind;
And heaven defend your good souls that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
For she is with me. No, when light-winged toys
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation!
DUKE. Be it as you shall privately determine,
Either for her stay or going. Th' affair cries haste,
And speed must answer it. You must hence to-night.
[DESDEMONA. To-night, my lord?
DUKE. This night.]
OTHELLO. With all my heart.
DUKE. At nine i' th' morning here we'll meet again.
Othello, leave some officer behind,
And he shall our commission bring to you,
With such things else of quality and respect
As doth import you.
OTHELLO. So please your grace, my ancient;
A man he is of honesty and trust.
To his conveyance I assign my wife,
With what else needful your good grace shall think
To be sent after me.
DUKE. Let it be so.
Good night to every one. [*to Brabantio*] And, noble signior,

264. young affects: uncontrolled passions. The general sense is clear but the text is puzzling: "*my* defunct" has been emended to "*me* defunct."
267. defend: forbid. 269. For: because.
270. seel: sew up the eyes of (as a falcon).
271. My . . . instruments: mind and body. 274. indign: disgraceful.
275. estimation: reputation.
278–9. From Q; F assigns "You must . . . night" to First Senator and omits Desdemona's question.

If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

1. SENATOR. Adieu, brave Moor. Use Desdemona well.

BRABANTIO. Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

OTHELLO. My life upon her faith!

Exeunt [*Duke, Senators, Officers, &c.*].

Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave to thee.
I prithee let thy wife attend on her,
And bring them after in the best advantage.
Come, Desdemona. I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matters and direction,
To spend with thee. We must obey the time.

Exit Moor and Desdemona.

RODERIGO. Iago,—

IAGO. What say'st thou, noble heart?

RODERIGO. What will I do, think'st thou?

IAGO. Why, go to bed and sleep.

RODERIGO. I will incontinently drown myself.

IAGO. If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why, thou silly gentleman?

RODERIGO. It is silliness to live when to live is torment; and then have we a prescription to die when death is our physician.

IAGO. O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years; and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.

RODERIGO. What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO. Virtue? a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many—either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry—why, the power and corrigible au-

290. delighted: delightful. 306. incontinently: immediately.
329. corrigible: corrective.

thority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take
337 this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

RODERIGO. It cannot be.

IAGO. It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man! Drown thyself? Drown cats and blind puppies! I have professed me thy friend, and I confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable toughness. I could never better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse. Follow these wars; defeat thy favor with an usurped beard. I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he his to her. It was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration—put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills—fill thy purse with money. The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice. [She must have change, she must.] Therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst. If sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her. Therefore make money. A pox of drowning! 'Tis clean out of the way. Seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than to be
369 drowned and go without her.

RODERIGO. Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?

337. Sect or scion: growth. Perhaps *sect* is a misreading for *set*, which like *scion* means a shoot growing out of the main plant.
344. perdurable: everlasting. stead: help.
345–6. defeat . . . usurped beard: spoil your appearance with the disguise of a beard.
351. sequestration: cessation and separation.
354. locusts: sweet fruit of a Mediterranean evergreen, the carob.
355. coloquintida: a bitter apple, yielding a purgative.
357. The bracketed sentence is from Q, which omits "She must change for youth."
362. erring: vagabond. supersubtle: delicate and refined.

IAGO. Thou art sure of me. Go, make money. I have told thee often, and I retell thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many events in the womb of time, which will be delivered. Traverse, go, provide thy money! We have more of this to-morrow. Adieu.

RODERIGO. Where shall we meet i' th' morning?

IAGO. At my lodging.

RODERIGO. I'll be with thee betimes.

IAGO. Go to, farewell.—Do you hear, Roderigo?

[RODERIGO. What say you?

IAGO. No more of drowning, do you hear?

RODERIGO. I am changed.

IAGO. Go to, farewell. Put money enough in your purse.]

RODERIGO. I'll sell my land. *Exit.*

IAGO. Thus do I ever make my fool my purse;
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor;
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
H'as done my office. I know not if't be true;
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now:
To get his place, and to plume up my will
In double knavery—How, how?—Let's see:—
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected—framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so;
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are.

373. hearted: heartfelt. 386. Text combines Q and F.
391. snipe: silly bird, fool. 398. proper: handsome.
399. plume up my will: dress up my scheme. 403. dispose: manner.

I have't! It is engendered! Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

Exit.

Act II. Scene i.

Enter Montano and two Gentlemen.

MONTANO. What from the cape can you discern at sea?
1. GENTLEMAN. Nothing at all: it is a high-wrought flood.
I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main
Descry a sail.
MONTANO. Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land;
A fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements.
If it hath ruffianed so upon the sea,
What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?
2. GENTLEMAN. A segregation of the Turkish fleet.
For do but stand upon the foaming shore,
The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds;
The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
Seems to cast water on the burning Bear
And quench the guards of th' ever-fixèd pole.
I never did like molestation view
On the enchafèd flood.
MONTANO. If that the Turkish fleet
Be not ensheltered and embayed, they are drowned;
It is impossible they bear it out.

Enter a third Gentleman.

3. GENTLEMAN. News, lads! Our wars are done.
The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks
That their designment halts. A noble ship of Venice
Hath seen a grievous wrack and sufferance
On most part of their fleet.
MONTANO. How? Is this true?
3. GENTLEMAN. The ship is here put in,

II. i. 10. segregation: scattering.
15. guards: two stars near the Pole or North Star.
16. molestation: disturbance. 17. enchafèd: rubbed, angry.
22. designment halts: plan is crippled. 23. sufferance: damage.

A Veronesa; Michael Cassio,
Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello,
Is come on shore; the Moor himself at sea,
And is in full commission here for Cyprus.
MONTANO. I am glad on't. 'Tis a worthy governor.
3. GENTLEMAN. But this same Cassio, though he speak of comfort
Touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly
And prays the Moor be safe, for they were parted
With foul and violent tempest.
MONTANO. Pray heaven he be;
For I have served him, and the man commands
Like a full soldier. Let's to the seaside, ho!
As well to see the vessel that's come in
As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,
Even till we make the main and th' aerial blue
An indistinct regard.
3. GENTLEMAN. Come, let's do so;
For every minute is expectancy
Of more arrivance.

Enter Cassio.

CASSIO. Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle,
That so approve the Moor! O, let the heavens
Give him defense against the elements,
For I have lost him on a dangerous sea!
MONTANO. Is he well shipped?
CASSIO. His bark is stoutly timbered, and his pilot
Of very expert and approved allowance;
Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death,
Stand in bold cure. (*Within*) A sail, a sail, a sail!

Enter a Messenger.

CASSIO. What noise?
MESSENGER. The town is empty; on the brow o' th' sea
Stand ranks of people, and they cry 'A sail!'
CASSIO. My hopes do shape him for the governor. *A shot.*
2. GENTLEMAN. They do discharge their shot of courtesy:

26. Veronesa: ship furnished by Verona. 32. sadly: grave.
39–40. main . . . regard: sea and sky indistinguishable.
50–51. surfeited . . . cure: therefore my hopes are not excessive and are in good order.

Our friends at least.
CASSIO. I pray you, sir, go forth
And give us truth who 'tis that is arrived.
2. GENTLEMAN. I shall. *Exit.*
MONTANO. But, good lieutenant, is your general wived?
CASSIO. Most fortunately. He hath achieved a maid
That paragons description and wild fame;
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
And in th' essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.

Enter Second Gentleman.

How now? Who has put in?
2. GENTLEMAN. 'Tis one Iago, ancient to the general.
CASSIO. H'as had most favorable and happy speed:
Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
The guttered rocks and congregated sands,
Traitors ensteeped to clog the guiltless keel,
As having sense of beauty, do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
The divine Desdemona.
MONTANA. What is she?
CASSIO. She that I spake of, our great captain's captain,
Left in the conduct of the bold Iago,
Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts
A se'nnight's speed. Great Jove, Othello guard,
And swell his sail with thine own pow'rful breath,
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms,
Give renewed fire to our extincted spirits,
[And bring all Cyprus comfort!]

Enter Desdemona, Iago, Roderigo, and Emilia [*with Attendants*].

O, behold!
The riches of the ship is come on shore!

62. paragons: surpasses: wild fame: extravagant report.
63. quirks: ingenious phrases. blazoning: picturing.
64–5. And . . . ingener: to describe her essential beauty exhausts the imagination.
69. guttered rocks: reefs. 70. ensteeped: submerged.
72. mortal: deadly.

Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round!
DESDEMONA. I thank you, valiant Cassio.
What tidings can you tell me of my lord?
CASSIO. He is not yet arrived; nor know I aught
But that he's well and will be shortly here.
DESDEMONA. O but I fear! How lost you company?
CASSIO. The great contention of the sea and skies
Parted our fellowship. (*Within*) A sail, a sail! [*A shot.*]
But hark. A sail!
2. GENTLEMAN. They give their greeting to the citadel;
This likewise is a friend.
CASSIO. See for the news.
[*Exit Gentleman.*]
Good ancient, you are welcome. [*to Emilia*] Welcome, mistress.—
Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,
That I extend my manners. 'Tis my breeding
That gives me this bold show of courtesy. [*Kisses Emilia.*]
IAGO. Sir, would she give you so much of her lips
As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,
You would have enough.
DESDEMONA. Alas, she has no speech!
IAGO. In faith, too much.
I find it still when I have list to sleep.
Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,
She puts her tongue a little in her heart
And chides with thinking.
EMILIA. You have little cause to say so.
IAGO. Come on, come on! You are pictures out of doors,
Bells in your parlors, wildcats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
Players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds.
DESDEMONA. O, fie upon thee, slanderer!
IAGO. Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk:
You rise to play, and go to bed to work.
EMILIA. You shall not write my praise.

105. list: desire.

IAGO. No, let me not.

DESDEMONA. What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?

IAGO. O gentle lady, do not put me to't,
For I am nothing if not critical.

DESDEMONA. Come on, assay.—There's one gone to the harbor?

IAGO. Ay, madam.

DESDEMONA. I am not merry; but I do beguile
The thing I am by seeming otherwise.—
Come, how wouldst thou praise me?

IAGO. I am about it; but indeed my invention
Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frieze—
It plucks out brains and all. But my Muse labors,
And thus she is delivered:
If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit—
The one's for use, the other useth it.

DESDEMONA. Well praised! How if she be black and witty?

IAGO. If she be black, and thereto have a wit,
She'll find a white that shall her blackness fit.

DESDEMONA. Worse and worse!

EMILIA. How if fair and foolish?

IAGO. She never yet was foolish that was fair,
For even her folly helped her to an heir.

DESDEMONA. These are old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i' th' alehouse. What miserable praise hast thou for her that's foul and foolish?

IAGO. There's none so foul, and foolish thereunto,
But does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do.

DESDEMONA. O heavy ignorance! Thou praisest the worst best. But what praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed—one that in the authority of her merit did justly put on the vouch of very malice itself?

IAGO. She that was ever fair, and never proud;
Had tongue at will, and yet was never loud;
Never lacked gold, and yet went never gay;
Fled from her wish, and yet said 'Now I may';
She that, being angered, her revenge being nigh,

126. birdlime: sticky paste for catching birds. frieze: coarse woolen cloth.
130. fair: blonde. 132. black: brunette. 139. fond: foolish.
148. put on the vouch: compel the approval.

Bade her wrong stay, and her displeasure fly;
She that in wisdom never was so frail
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;
She that could think, and ne'er disclose her mind;
See suitors following, and not look behind:
She was a wight (if ever such wight were)—

DESDEMONA. To do what?

IAGO. To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.

DESDEMONA. O most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband. How say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and liberal counsellor?

CASSIO. He speaks home, madam. You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.

IAGO. [*aside*] He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper! With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do! I will gyve thee in thine own courtship.—You say true; 'tis so, indeed!—If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft—which now again you are most apt to play the sir in. Very good! well kissed! an excellent curtsy! 'Tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster pipes for your sake! (*Trumpet within.*) The Moor! I know his trumpet.

CASSIO. 'Tis truly so.

DESDEMONA. Let's meet him and receive him.

CASSIO. Lo, where he comes.

Enter Othello and Attendants.

OTHELLO. O my fair warrior!

DESDEMONA. My dear Othello!

OTHELLO. It gives me wonder great as my content
To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,

154. wrong stay: sense of injury cease.
156. To . . . tail: to exchange the head of a common thing for the tail of a delicacy, with a bawdy under-meaning of taking a handsome lover.
159. wight: person. 161. small beer: trivialities.
165. profane and liberal: worldly and licentious.
167. in the: in the character of.
171–2. gyve . . . courtship: tie you up in your own fine manners.
175. play the sir: play the gallant.
180. clyster pipes: syringe for douche or enema.

May the winds blow till they have wakened death!
And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus-high, and duck again as low
As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.

DESDEMONA. The heavens forbid
But that our loves and comforts should increase
Even as our days do grow.

OTHELLO. Amen to that, sweet powers!
I cannot speak enough of this content;
It stops me here; it is too much of joy.
And this, and this, the greatest discords be *They kiss.*
That e'er our hearts shall make!

IAGO. [*aside*] O, you are well tuned now!
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.

OTHELLO. Come, let us to the castle.
News, friends! Our wars are done; the Turks are drowned.
How does my old acquaintance of this isle?—
Honey, you shall be well desired in Cyprus;
I have found great love amongst them. O my sweet,
I prattle out of fashion, and I dote
In mine own comforts. I prithee, good Iago,
Go to the bay and disembark my coffers.
Bring thou the master to the citadel;
He is a good one, and his worthiness
Does challenge much respect.—Come, Desdemona,
Once more well met at Cyprus.

Exit Othello [*with all but Iago and Roderigo*].

IAGO. [*to an Attendant, who goes out*] Do thou meet me presently at the harbor. [*to Roderigo*] Come hither. If thou be'st valiant (as they say base men being in love have then a nobility in their natures more than is native to them), list me. The lieutenant to-night watches on the court of guard. First, I must tell thee this: Desdemona is directly in love with him.

202. set down: loosen. 206. well desired: very welcome.
219. court of guard: guardhouse.

RODERIGO. With him? Why, 'tis not possible.

IAGO. Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be instructed. Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies; and will she love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be, again to inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties; all which the Moor is defective in. Now for want of these required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor. Very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted—as it is a most pregnant and unforced position—who stands so eminent in the degree of this fortune as Cassio does? A knave very voluble; no further conscionable than in putting on the mere form of civil and humane seeming for the better compassing of his salt and most hidden loose affection? Why, none! why, none! A slipper and subtle knave; a finder-out of occasions; that has an eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages, though true advantage never present itself; a devilish knave! Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after. A pestilent complete knave! and the woman hath found him already.

RODERIGO. I cannot believe that in her; she's full of most blessed condition.

IAGO. Blessed fig's-end! The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor. Blessed pudding! Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? Didst not mark that?

RODERIGO. Yes, that I did; but that was but courtesy.

IAGO. Lechery, by this hand! an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together. Villainous thoughts, Roderigo! When these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the master and main exercise, th' incorporate conclusion. Pish! But, sir, be you ruled by me: I have brought

230. again: from Q; F has "a game." 243. humane: courteous.
244. salt: lecherous. 245. slipper: slippery. 246. stamp: coin.
268. incorporate: physical.

you from Venice. Watch you to-night; for the command, I'll lay't upon you. Cassio knows you not. I'll not be far from you: do you find some occasion to anger Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting his discipline, or from what other course you please which the time shall more favorably minister.

RODERIGO. Well.

IAGO. Sir, he is rash and very sudden in choler, and haply with his truncheon may strike at you. Provoke him that he may; for even out of that will I cause these of Cyprus to mutiny; whose qualification shall come into no true taste again but by the displanting of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter journey to your desires by the means I shall then have to prefer them; and the impediment most profitably removed without the which there were no expectation of our prosperity.

RODERIGO. I will do this if you can bring it to any opportunity.

IAGO. I warrant thee. Meet me by and by at the citadel; I must fetch his necessaries ashore. Farewell.

RODERIGO. Adieu. *Exit.*

IAGO. That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it;
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.
The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband. Now I do love her too;
Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure
I stand accountant for as great a sin,
But partly led to diet my revenge,
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leaped into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife;
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure. Which thing to do,
If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash
For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,

275. tainting: discrediting.
283. qualification: appeasement (from *qualify:* to dilute a drink).
312. I trash: hang weights on him, like those put on a hound to keep him from hunting too fast.

I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb
(For I fear Cassio with my nightcap too),
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
For making him egregiously an ass
And practicing upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused:
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used. *Exit.*

Scene ii.

Enter Othello's Herald, with a proclamation.

HERALD. It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him. For, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial. So much was his pleasure should be proclaimed. All offices are open, and there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello! *Exit.*

Scene iii.

Enter Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and Attendants.

OTHELLO. Good Michael, look you to the guard to-night.
Let's teach ourselves that honorable stop,
Not to outsport discretion.
CASSIO. Iago hath direction what to do;
But not withstanding, with my personal eye
Will I look to't.
OTHELLO. Iago is most honest.
Michael, good night. To-morrow with your earliest
Let me have speech with you. [*to Desdemona*] Come, my dear love.

315. rank garb: coarse manner.
II. ii. 3. mere perdition: complete destruction.
10. offices: places of food and drink.

The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;
That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you.—
Good night.

Exit [*Othello with Desdemona and Attendants*].

Enter Iago.

CASSIO. Welcome, Iago. We must to the watch.

IAGO. Not this hour, lieutenant; 'tis not yet ten o' th' clock. Our general cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona; who let us not therefore blame. He hath not yet made wanton the night with her, and she is sport for Jove.

CASSIO. She's a most exquisite lady.

IAGO. And, I'll warrant her, full of game.

CASSIO. Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate creature.

IAGO. What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation.

CASSIO. An inviting eye; and yet methinks right modest.

IAGO. And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?

CASSIO. She is indeed perfection.

IAGO. Well, happiness to their sheets! Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine, and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello.

CASSIO. Not to-night, good Iago. I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking; I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment.

IAGO. O, they are our friends. But one cup! I'll drink for you.

CASSIO. I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that was craftily qualified too; and behold what innovation it makes here. I am unfortunate in the infirmity and dare not task my weakness with any more.

IAGO. What, man! 'Tis a night of revels: the gallant desire it.

CASSIO. Where are they?

IAGO. Here at the door; I pray you call them in.

CASSIO. I'll do't, but it dislikes me. *Exit.*

IAGO. If I can fasten but one cup upon him
With that which he hath drunk to-night already,
He'll be as full of quarrel and offense
As my young mistress' dog. Now my sick fool Roderigo,

II. iii. 14. cast: dismissed. 30. stoup: two-quart tankard.
41. craftily qualified: carefully diluted. innovation: radical change.

Whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out,
To Desdemona hath to-night caroused
Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch.
Three lads of Cyprus—noble swelling spirits,
That hold their honors in a wary distance,
The very elements of this warlike isle—
Have I to-night flustered with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of drunkards
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle.

Enter Cassio, Montano, and Gentlemen; [*Servants following with wine*].

But here they come.
If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.

CASSIO. 'Fore God, they have given me a rouse already.

MONTANO. Good faith, a little one; not past a pint, as I am a soldier.

IAGO. Some wine, ho!

[*Sings*] And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink.
A soldier's a man;
A life's but a span,
Why then, let a soldier drink.
Some wine, boys!

CASSIO. 'Fore God, an excellent song!

IAGO. I learned it in England, where indeed they are most potent in potting. Your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander—Drink, ho!—are nothing to your English.

CASSIO. Is your Englishman so expert in his drinking?

IAGO. Why, he drinks you with facility your Dane dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your Almain; he gives your Hollander a vomit ere the next pottle can be filled.

CASSIO. To the health of our general!

MONTANO. I am for it, lieutenant, and I'll do you justice.

IAGO. O sweet England!

[*Sings*] King Stephen was a worthy peer;
His breeches cost him but a crown;

56. pottle-deep: bottoms up. 66. rouse: a big drink.

He held 'em sixpence all to dear,
With that he called the tailor lown.
He was a wight of high renown,
And thou art but of low degree.
'Tis pride that pulls the country down;
Then take thine auld cloak about thee.
Some wine, ho!

CASSIO. 'Fore God, this is a more exquisite song than the other.

IAGO. Will you hear't again?

CASSIO. No, for I hold him to be unworthy of his place that does those things. Well, God's above all; and there be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.

IAGO. It's true, good lieutenant.

CASSIO. For mine own part—no offense to the general, nor any man of quality—I hope to be saved.

IAGO. And so do I too, lieutenant.

CASSIO. Ay, but, by your leave, not before me. The lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient. Let's have no more of this; let's to our affairs.—God forgive us our sins!—Gentlemen, let's look to our business. Do not think, gentlemen, I am drunk. This is my ancient; this is my right hand, and this is my left. I am not drunk now. I can stand well enough, and speak well enough.

ALL. Excellent well!

CASSIO. Why, very well then. You must not think then that I am drunk. *Exit.*

MONTANO. To th' platform, masters. Come, let's set the watch.

IAGO. You see this fellow that is gone before.
He is a soldier fit to stand by Caesar
And give direction; and do but see his vice.
'Tis to his virtue a just equinox,
The one as long as th' other. 'Tis pity of him.
I fear the trust Othello puts him in,
On some odd time of his infirmity,
Will shake this island.

MONTANO. But is he often thus?

IAGO. 'Tis evermore the prologue to his sleep:

95. lown: lout.
129. just equinox: the night of his vice is exactly equal to the day of his virtue.

He'll watch the horologe a double set
If drink rock not his cradle.
MONTANO. It were well
The general were put in mind of it.
Perhaps he sees it not, or his good nature
Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio
And looks not on his evils. Is not this true?

Enter Roderigo.

IAGO. [*aside to him*] How now, Roderigo?
I pray you after the lieutenant, go! *Exit Roderigo.*
MONTANO. And 'tis great pity that the noble Moor
Should hazard such a place as his own second
With one of an ingraft infirmity.
It were an honest action to say
So to the Moor.
IAGO. Not I, for this fair island!
I do love Cassio well and would do much
To cure him of this evil. (*Within*) Help! help!
But hark! What noise?

Enter Cassio, driving in Roderigo.

CASSIO. Zounds, you rogue! you rascal!
MONTANO. What's the matter, lieutenant?
CASSIO. A knave teach me my duty?
I'll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle.
RODERIGO. Beat me?
CASSIO. Dost thou prate, rogue? [*Strikes him.*]
MONTANO. Nay, good lieutenant!
[*Stays him.*]
Pray, sir, hold your hand.
CASSIO. Let me go, sir,
Or I'll knock you o'er the mazzard.
MONTANO. Come, come, you're drunk!
CASSIO. Drunk? *They fight.*
IAGO. [*aside to Roderigo*] Away, I say! Go out and cry a mutiny!
Exit Roderigo.

135. watch . . . set: stay awake twice around the clock.
152. twiggen: wicker-covered. 155. mazzard: head.

Nay, good lieutenant. God's will, gentlemen!
Help, ho!—lieutenant—sir—Montano—sir—
Help, masters!—Here's a goodly watch indeed!

A bell rung.

Who's that which rings the bell? Diablo, ho!
The town will rise. God's will, lieutenant, hold!
You will be shamed for ever.

Enter Othello and Gentlemen with weapons.

OTHELLO. What is the matter here?

MONTANO. Zounds, I bleed still. I am hurt to the death.
He dies!

OTHELLO. Hold for your lives!

IAGO. Hold, hold! Lieutenant—sir—Montano—gentlemen!
Have you forgot all sense of place and duty?
Hold! The general speaks to you. Hold, hold, for shame!

OTHELLO. Why, how now, ho? From whence ariseth this?
Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
For Christian shame put by this barbarous brawl!
He that stirs next to carve for his own rage
Holds his soul light; he dies upon his motion.
Silence that dreadful bell! It frights the isle
From her propriety. What's the matter, masters?
Honest Iago, that looks dead with grieving,
Speak. Who began this? On thy love, I charge thee.

IAGO. I do not know. Friends all but now, even now,
In quarter, and in terms like bride and groom
Devesting them for bed; and then, but now—
As if some planet had unwitted men—
Swords out, and tilting one at other's breast
In opposition bloody. I cannot speak
Any beginning to this peevish odds,
And would in action glorious I had lost
Those legs that brought me to a part of it!

OTHELLO. How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?

CASSIO. I pray you pardon me; I cannot speak.

OTHELLO. Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil;
The gravity and stillness of your youth

176. propriety: natural condition.

The world hath noted, and your name is great
In mouths of wisest censure. What's the matter
That you unlace your reputation thus
And spend your rich opinion for the name
Of a night-brawler? Give me answer to't.
MONTANO. Worthy Othello, I am hurt to danger.
Your officer, Iago, can inform you,
While I spare speech, which something now offends me,
Of all that I do know; nor know I aught
By me that's said or done amiss this night,
Unless self-charity be sometimes a vice,
And to defend ourselves it be a sin
When violence assails us.
OTHELLO. Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion, having my best judgment collied,
Assays to lead the way. If I once stir
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
Shall sink in my rebuke. Give me to know
How this foul rout began, who set it on;
And he that is approved in this offense,
Though he had twinned with me, both at a birth,
Shall lose me. What! in a town of war,
Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,
To manage private and domestic quarrel?
In night, and on the court and guard of safety?
'Tis monstrous. Iago, who began't?
MONTANO. If partially affined, or leagued in office,
Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,
Thou art no soldier.
IAGO. Touch me not so near.
I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth
Than it should do offense to Michael Cassio;
Yet I persuade myself, to speak the truth
Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.
Montano and myself being in speech,
There comes a fellow crying out for help,
And Cassio following him with determined sword

206. collied: clouded. 211. approved: proved guilty.
218. partially . . . office: if made partial by personal or official ties.

To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman
Steps in to Cassio and entreats his pause.
Myself the crying fellow did pursue,
Lest by his clamor—as it so fell out—
The town might fall in fright. He, swift of foot,
Outran my purpose; and I returned the rather
For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,
And Cassio high in oath; which till to-night
I ne'er might say before. When I came back—
For this was brief—I found them close together
At blow and thrust, even as again they were
When you yourself did part them.
More of this matter cannot I report;
But men are men; the best sometimes forget.
Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,
As men in rage strike those that wish them best,
Yet surely Cassio I believe received
From him that fled some strange indignity,
Which patience could not pass.

OTHELLO. I know, Iago,
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee;
But never more be officer of mine.

Enter Desdemona, attended.

Look if my gentle love be not raised up!
I'll make thee an example.

DESDEMONA. What's the matter?

OTHELLO. All's well now, sweeting; come away to bed.
[*To Montano*] Sir, for your hurts, myself will be your surgeon.
Lead him off. [*Montano is led off.*]
Iago, look with care about the town
And silence those whom this vile brawl distracted.
Come, Desdemona: 'tis the soldiers' life
To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife.
Exit [*with all but Iago and Cassio*].

IAGO. What, are you hurt, lieutenant?

CASSIO. Ay, past all surgery.

IAGO. Marry, God forbid!

CASSIO. Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

IAGO. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound. There is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man! there are ways to recover the general again. You are but now cast in his mood—a punishment more in policy than in malice, even so as one would beat his offenseless dog to affright an imperious lion. Sue to him again, and he's yours.

CASSIO. I will rather sue to be despised than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer. Drunk! and speak parrot! and squabble! swagger! swear! and discourse fustian with one's own shadow! O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!

IAGO. What was he that you followed with your sword? What had he done to you?

CASSIO. I know not.

IAGO. Is't possible?

CASSIO. I remember a mass of things, but nothing distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore. O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! that we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts!

IAGO. Why, but you are now well enough. How came you thus recovered?

CASSIO. It hath pleased the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath. One unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly despise myself.

IAGO. Come, you are too severe a moraler. As the time, the place, and the condition of this country stands, I could heartily wish this had not so befall'n; but since it is as it is, mend it for your own good.

CASSIO. I will ask him for my place again: he shall tell me I am a drunkard! Had I as many mouths as Hydra, such an answer

273. cast in his mood: dismissed only because he is in an angry mood.

would stop them all. To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblest, and the ingredient is a devil.

IAGO. Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature if it be well used. Exclaim no more against it. And, good lieutenant, I think you think I love you.

CASSIO. I have well approved it, sir. I drunk!

IAGO. You or any man living may be drunk at some time, man. I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general. I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and denotement of her parts and graces. Confess yourself freely to her; importune her help to put you in your place again. She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested. This broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splinter; and my fortunes against any lay worth naming, this crack of your love shall grow stronger than 'twas before.

CASSIO. You advise me well.

IAGO. I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.

CASSIO. I think it freely; and betimes in the morning will I beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me. I am desperate of my fortunes if they check me here.

IAGO. You are in the right. Good night, lieutenant; I must to the watch.

CASSIO. Good night, honest Iago. *Exit Cassio.*

IAGO. And what's he then that says I play the villain,
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
Th' inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit; she's framed as fruitful
As the free elements. And then for her
To win the Moor—were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemèd sin—
His soul is so enfettered to her love
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain

330. lay: wager. 344. Probal: probable. 347. fruitful: generous.

To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now. For whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes,
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,
That she repeals him for her body's lust;
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

Enter Roderigo.

How, now, Roderigo?

RODERIGO. I do follow here in the chase, not like a hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry. My money is almost spent; I have been to-night exceedingly well cudgelled; and I think the issue will be—I shall have so much experience for my pains; and so, with no money at all, and a little more wit, return again to Venice.

IAGO. How poor are they that have not patience!
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?
Thou know'st we work by wit, and not by witchcraft;
And with depends on dilatory time.
Does't not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee,
And thou by that small hurt hast cashiered Cassio.
Though other things grow fair against the sun,
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe.
Content thyself awhile. By the mass, 'tis morning!
Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.
Retire thee; go where thou art billeted.
Away, I say! Thou shalt know more hereafter.
Nay, get thee gone! *Exit Roderigo.*
Two things are to be done:
My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress;
I'll set her on;

363. repeals: pleads for his reinstatement. 371. cry: pack.

Myself the while to draw the Moor apart
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way!
Dull not device by coldness and delay. *Exit.*

Act III. Scene i.

Enter Cassio, with Musicians.

CASSIO. Masters, play here, I will content your pains:
Something that's brief; and bid 'Good morrow, general.'
[*They play.*]

Enter the Clown.

CLOWN. Why, masters, ha' your instruments been at Naples, that they speak i' th' nose thus?

MUSICIAN. How, sir, how?

CLOWN. Are these, I pray, called wind instruments?

MUSICIAN. Ay, marry, are they, sir.

CLOWN. O, thereby hangs a tail.

MUSICIAN. Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

CLOWN. Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know. But, masters, here's money for you; and the general so likes your music that he desires you, for love's sake, to make no more noise with it.

MUSICIAN. Well, sir, we will not.

CLOWN. If you have any music that may not be heard, to't again: but, as they say, to hear music the general does not greatly care.

MUSICIAN. We have none such, sir.

CLOWN. Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away. Go, vanish into air, away! *Exit Musician* [*with his fellows*].

CASSIO. Dost thou hear, my honest friend?

CLOWN. No, I hear not your honest friend. I hear you.

CASSIO. Prithee keep up thy quillets. There's a poor piece of gold

392. jump: at the exact time.

III. i. 4. Naples: may refer to the Neopolitan nasal drawl, or to the reputation of Naples for venereal disease, which may affect the nasal structure. The latter is in keeping with the Clown's bawdy us of *tail* and *wind instrument*.

24. quillets: word-play.

for thee. If the gentlewoman that attends the general's wife be stirring, tell her there's one Cassio entreats her a little favor of speech. Wilt thou do this?

CLOWN. She is stirring, sir. If she will stir hither, I shall seem to notify unto her.

CASSIO. [Do, good my friend.] *Exit Clown.*

Enter Iago.

In happy time, Iago.

IAGO. You have not been abed then!

CASSIO. Why, no; the day had broke
Before we parted. I have made bold, Iago,
To send in to your wife: my suit to her
Is that she will to virtuous Desdemona
Procure me some access.

IAGO. I'll send her to you presently;
And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor
Out of the way, that your converse and business
May be more free.

CASSIO. I humbly thank you for't. *Exit [Iago].*
I never knew
A Florentine more kind and honest.

Enter Emilia.

EMILIA. Good morrow, good lieutenant. I am sorry
For your displeasure; but all will sure be well.
The general and his wife are talking of it,
And she speaks for you stoutly. The Moor replies
That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus
And great affinity, and that in wholesome wisdom
He might not but refuse you; but he protests he loves you,
And needs no other suitor but his likings
To take the safest occasion by the front
To bring you in again.

CASSIO. Yet I beseech you,
If you think fit, or that it may be done,
Give me advantage of some brief discourse
With Desdemona alone.

52. front: forelock. Occasion (opportunity) was personified as bald behind and hairy in front.

EMILIA. Pray you come in.
I will bestow you where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely.
CASSIO. I am much bound to you. *Exeunt.*

Scene ii.

Enter Othello, Iago, and Gentlemen.

OTHELLO. These letters give, Iago, to the pilot
And by him do my duties to the Senate.
That done, I will be walking on the works;
Repair there to me.
IAGO. Well, my good lord, I'll do't.
OTHELLO. This fortification, gentlemen, shall we see't?
GENTLEMEN. We'll wait upon your lordship. *Exeunt.*

Scene iii.

Enter Desdemona, Cassio, and Emilia.

DESDEMONA. Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do
All my abilities in thy behalf.
EMILIA. Good madam, do. I warrant it grieves my husband
As if the cause were his.
DESDEMONA. O, that's an honest fellow. Do not doubt, Cassio,
But I will have my lord and you again
As friendly as you were.
CASSIO. Bounteous madam,
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio,
He's never anything but your true servant.
DESDEMONA. I know't; I thank you. You do love my lord;
You have known him long; and be you well assured
He shall in strangeness stand no farther off
Than in a politic distance.
CASSIO. Ay, but, lady,
That policy may either last so long,
Or feed upon such nice and waterish diet,
Or breed itself so out of circumstance,

III. ii. 3. works: fortifications. III. iii. 15. nice: trivial.

That, I being absent, and my place supplied,
My general will forget my love and service.
DESDEMONA. Do not doubt that; before Emilia here
I give thee warrant of thy place. Assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
To the last article. My lord shall never rest;
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I'll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio,
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away.

Enter Othello and Iago [*at a distance*].

EMILIA. Madam, here comes my lord.
CASSIO. Madam, I'll take my leave.
DESDEMONA. Why, stay, and hear me speak.
CASSIO. Madam, not now: I am very ill at ease,
Unfit for mine own purposes.
DESDEMONA. Well, do your discretion. *Exit Cassio.*
IAGO. Ha! I like not that.
OTHELLO. What dost thou say?
IAGO. Nothing, my lord; or if—I know not what.
OTHELLO. Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?
IAGO. Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing you coming.
OTHELLO. I do believe 'twas he.
DESDEMONA. How now, my lord?
I have been talking with a suitor here,
A man that languishes in your displeasure.
OTHELLO. Who is't you mean?
DESDEMONA. Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord,
If I have any grace or power to move you,
His present reconciliation take;
For if he be not one that truly loves you,
That errs in ignorance, and not in cunning,

19. doubt: fear.
23. watch him tame: animals and hawks were tamed by being kept awake.
24. shrift: confessional.

I have no judgment in an honest face.
I prithee call him back.
OTHELLO. Went he hence now?
DESDEMONA. Yes, faith; so humbled
That he hath left part of his grief with me
To suffer with him. Good love, call him back.
OTHELLO. Not now, sweet Desdemon; some other time.
DESDEMONA. But shall't be shortly?
OTHELLO. The sooner, sweet, for you.
DESDEMONA. Shall't be to-night at supper?
OTHELLO. No, not to-night.
DESDEMONA. To-morrow dinner then?
OTHELLO. I shall not dine at home;
I meet the captains at the citadel.
DESDEMONA. Why then, to-morrow night, or Tuesday morn,
On Tuesday noon or night, or Wednesday morn.
I prithee name the time, but let it not
Exceed three days. I' faith, he's penitent;
And yet his trespass, in our common reason
(Save that, they say, the wars must make examples
Out of their best), is not almost a fault
T' incur a private check. When shall he come?
Tell me, Othello. I wonder in my soul
What you could ask me that I should deny
Or stand so mamm'ring on. What? Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do
To bring him in? By'r Lady, I could do much—
OTHELLO. Prithee no more. Let him come when he will!
I will deny thee nothing.
DESDEMONA. Why, this is not a boon;
'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person. Nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficult weight,
And fearful to be granted.
OTHELLO. I will deny thee nothing!

Whereon I do beseech thee grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.
DESDEMONA. Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord.
OTHELLO. Farewell, my Desdemon: I'll come to thee straight.
DESDEMONA. Emilia, come.—Be as your fancies teach you;
Whate'er you be, I am obedient. *Exit* [*with Emilia*].
OTHELLO. Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.
IAGO. My noble lord—
OTHELLO. What dost thou say, Iago?
IAGO. Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
Know of your love?
OTHELLO. He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?
IAGO. But for a satisfaction of my thought;
No further harm.
OTHELLO. Why of thy thought, Iago?
IAGO. I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
OTHELLO. O, yes, and went between us very oft.
IAGO. Indeed?
OTHELLO. Indeed? Ay, indeed! Discern'st thou aught in that?
Is he not honest?
IAGO. Honest, my lord?
OTHELLO. Honest. Ay, honest.
IAGO. My lord, for aught I know.
OTHELLO. What dost thou think?
IAGO. Think, my lord?
OTHELLO. Think, my lord?
By heaven, he echoes me,
As if there were some monster in his thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something:
I heard thee say but now, thou lik'st not that,
When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?
And when I told thee he was of my counsel
In my whole course of wooing, thou cried'st 'Indeed?'
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,
Show me thy thought.

115. conceit: idea.

IAGO. My lord, you know I love you.
OTHELLO. I think thou dost;
And, for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more;
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom; but in a man that's just
They are close dilations, working from the heart
That passion cannot rule.
IAGO. For Michael Cassio,
I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.
OTHELLO. I think so too.
IAGO. Men should be what they seem;
Or those that be not, would they might seem none!
OTHELLO. Certain, men should be what they seem.
IAGO. Why then, I think Cassio's an honest man.
OTHELLO. Nay, yet there's more in this.
I prithee speak to me as to thy thinkings,
As thou dost ruminate, and give thy worst of thoughts
The worst of words.
IAGO. Good my lord, pardon me:
Though I am bound to every act of duty,
I am not bound to that all slaves are free to.
Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false,
As where's that palace whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure
But some uncleanly apprehensions
Keep leets and law days, and in session sit
With meditations lawful?
OTHELLO. Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but think'st him wronged, and mak'st his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.
IAGO. I do beseech you—
Though I perchance am vicious in my guess
(As I confess it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not), that your wisdom yet
From one that so imperfectly conjects

123. close dilations: deep-swelling feelings. 140. leets: local courts. 149. conjects: conjectures.

Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance.
It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.
OTHELLO. What dost thou mean?
IAGO. Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.
OTHELLO. By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!
IAGO. You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;
Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody.
OTHELLO. Ha!
IAGO. O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts—suspects, yet strongly loves!
OTHELLO. O misery!
IAGO. Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;
But riches fineless is as poor as winter
To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
Good God, the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy!
OTHELLO. Why, why is this?
Think'st thou I'ld make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No! To be once in doubt
Is once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,

166. mock: torture. 173. fineless: boundless.
182. exsufflicate and blown: inflated and flyblown.

Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof there is no more but this—
Away at once with love or jealousy!

IAGO. I am glad of this; for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you
With franker spirit. Therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.
Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;
Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure:
I would not have your free and noble nature,
Out of self-bounty, be abused. Look to't.
I know our country disposition well:
In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.

OTHELLO. Dost thou say so?

IAGO. She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,
She loved them most.

OTHELLO. And so she did.

IAGO. Why, go to then!
She that, so young, could give out such a seeming
To seel her father's eyes up close as oak—
He thought 'twas witchcraft—but I am much to blame.
I humbly do beseech you of your pardon
For too much loving you.

OTHELLO. I am bound to thee for ever.

IAGO. I see this hath a little dashed your spirits.

OTHELLO. Not a jot, not a jot.

IAGO. I' faith, I fear it has.
I hope you will consider what is spoke
Comes from my love. But I do see y' are moved.
I am to pray you not to strain my speech

200. self-bounty: innate goodness.
210. seel: close up (hoodwink). oak: close-grained wood.

To grosser issues nor to larger reach
Than to suspicion.
OTHELLO. I will not.
IAGO. Should you do so, my lord,
My speech should fall into such vile success
As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio's my worthy friend—
My lord, I see y' are moved.
OTHELLO. No, not much moved:
I do not think but Desdemona's honest.
IAGO. Long live she so! and long live you to think so!
OTHELLO. And yet, how nature erring from itself—
IAGO. Ay, there's the point! as (to be bold with you)
Not to affect many proposèd matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural—
But pardon me—I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent.
OTHELLO. Farewell, farewell!
If more thou dost perceive, let me know more.
Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago.
IAGO. My lord, I take my leave. [*Going.*]
OTHELLO. Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless
Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.
IAGO. [*returns*] My lord, I would I might entreat your honor
To scan this thing no further: leave it to time.
Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place,
For sure he fills it up with great ability,
Yet, if you please to hold him off awhile,
You shall by that perceive him and his means.
Note if your lady strain his entertainment

232. will: sexual desire. 234. position: formal judgment.
236. recoiling: returning.
237. fall to match: start to compare. country forms: appearance of her (white) countrymen.
238. happily: perhaps.
250. strain his entertainment: urge his reinstatement.

With any strong or vehement importunity;
Much will be seen in that. In the mean time
Let me be thought too busy in my fears
(As worthy cause I have to fear I am)
And hold her free, I do beseech your honor.

OTHELLO. Fear not my government.

IAGO. I once more take my leave. *Exit.*

OTHELLO. This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learnèd spirit
Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune. Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years—yet that's not much—
She's gone. I am abused, and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others' uses. Yet 'tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogatived are they less than the base.
'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death.
Even then this forkèd plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. Look where she comes.

Enter Desdemona and Emilia.

If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!
I'll not believe't.

DESDEMONA. How now, my dear Othello?
Your dinner, and the generous islanders
By you invited, do attend your presence.

OTHELLO. I am to blame.

260. haggard: wild hawk.
261. jesses: short straps on the hawk's legs left attached when unfastened from the leash.
262 whistle . . . wind: free her (as was done with an untamable haggard) and let her go to ruin on her own.
276. forkèd: of a cuckold. 277. quicken: are born.

DESDEMONA. Why do you speak so faintly?
Are you not well?
OTHELLO. I have a pain upon my forehead, here.
DESDEMONA. Faith, that's with watching; 'twill away again.
Let me but bind it hard, within this hour
It will be well.
OTHELLO. Your napkin is too little;
[*He pushes the handkerchief from him, and it falls unnoticed.*]
Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.
DESDEMONA. I am very sorry that you are not well.
Exit [*with Othello*].
EMILIA. I am glad I have found this napkin;
This was her first remembrance from the Moor.
My wayward husband hath a hundred times
Wooed me to steal it; but she so loves the token
(For he conjured her she should ever keep it)
That she reserves it evermore about her
To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out
And give't Iago.
What he will do with it heaven knows, not I;
I nothing but to please his fantasy.

Enter Iago.

IAGO. How now? What do you here alone?
EMILIA. Do not you chide; I have a thing for you.
IAGO. A thing for me? It is a common thing—
EMILIA. Ha?
IAGO. To have a foolish wife.
EMILIA. O, is that all? What will you give me now
For that same handkerchief?
IAGO. What handkerchief?
EMILIA. What handkerchief!
Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona;
That which so often you did bid me steal.
IAGO. Hast stol'n it from her?
EMILIA. No, faith; she let it drop by negligence,
And to th' advantage, I, being here, took't up.
Look, here it is.

296. work ta'en out: pattern copied.

IAGO. A good wench! Give it me.
EMILIA. What will you do with't, that you have been so earnest
To have me filch it?
IAGO. Why, what's that to you? [*Snatches it.*]
EMILIA. If it be not for some purpose of import,
Give't me again. Poor lady, she'll run mad
When she shall lack it.
IAGO. Be not acknown on't; I have use for it.
Go, leave me. *Exit Emilia.*
I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison:
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulphur.

Enter Othello.

I did say so.
Look where he comes! Not poppy nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever med'cine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday.
OTHELLO. Ha! ha! false to me?
IAGO. Why, how now, general? No more of that!
OTHELLO. Avaunt! be gone! Thou hast set me on the rack.
I swear 'tis better to be much abused
Than but to know't a little.
IAGO. How now, my lord?
OTHELLO. What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?
I saw't not, thought it not, it harmed not me;
I slept the next night well, fed well, was free and merry;
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips.
He that is robbed, not wanting what is stol'n,
Let him not know't, and he's not robbed at all.
IAGO. I am sorry to hear this.
OTHELLO. I had been happy if the general camp,
Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,

346. Pioners: lowest of soldiers, diggers of trenches and mines.

So I had nothing known. O, now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
Farewell the plumèd troop, and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

IAGO. Is't possible, my lord?

OTHELLO. Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore!
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof;
Or, by the worth of man's eternal soul,
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my waked wrath!

IAGO. Is't come to this?

OTHELLO. Make me to see't; or at the least so prove it
That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
To hang a doubt on—or woe upon thy life!

IAGO. My noble lord—

OTHELLO. If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror's head horrors accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed;
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that.

IAGO. O grace! O heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?—
God b' wi' you! take mine office. O wretched fool,
That liv'st to make thine honesty a vice!
O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world,
To be direct and honest is not safe.
I thank you for this profit; and from hence
I'll love no friend, sith love breed such offense.

OTHELLO. Nay, stay. Thou shouldst be honest.

IAGO. I should be wise; for honesty's a fool
And loses that it works for.

OTHELLO. By the world,

354. circumstance: pageantry. 365. probation: proof.

I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!

IAGO. I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion:
I do repent me that I put it to you.
You would be satisfied?

OTHELLO. Would? Nay, I will.

IAGO. And may; but how? how satisfied, my lord?
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
Behold her topped?

OTHELLO. Death and damnation! O!

IAGO. It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring them to that prospect. Damn them then,
If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
More than their own! What then? How then?
What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances
Which lead directly to the door of truth
Will give you satisfaction, you may have't.

OTHELLO. Give me a living reason she's disloyal.

IAGO. I do not like the office.
But sith I am entered in this cause so far,
Pricked to't by foolish honesty and love,
I will go on. I lay with Cassio lately,
And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.
There are a kind of men so loose of soul
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs.
One of this kind is Cassio.
In sleep I heard him say, 'Sweet Desdemona,

399. bolster: lie together. 403. prime: lustful.
404. salt: lecherous. pride: heat.

Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!'
And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
Cry 'O sweet creature!' and then kiss me hard,
As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
That grew upon my lips; then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sighed, and kissed, and then
Cried 'Cursèd fate that gave thee to the Moor!'
OTHELLO. O monstrous! monstrous!
IAGO. Nay, this was but his dream.
OTHELLO. But this denoted a foregone conclusion:
'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream.
IAGO. And this may help to thicken other proofs
That do demonstrate thinly.
OTHELLO. I'll tear her all to pieces!
IAGO. Nay, but be wise. Yet we see nothing done;
She may be honest yet. Tell me but this—
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief
Spotted with strawberries in your wife's hand?
OTHELLO. I gave her such a one; 'twas my first gift.
IAGO. I know not that; but such a handkerchief—
I am sure it was your wife's—did I to-day
See Cassio wipe his beard with.
OTHELLO. If't be that—
IAGO. If it be that, or any that was hers,
It speaks against her with the other proofs.
OTHELLO. O, that the slave had forty thousand lives!
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.
Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago:
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone.
Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!
IAGO. Yet be content.
OTHELLO. O, blood, blood, blood!
IAGO. Patience, I say. Your mind perhaps may change.
OTHELLO. Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,

429. a shrewd doubt: bitterly suspicious. 449. fraught: burden.
450. aspics': asps' (poisonous snakes). 453. Pontic sea: Black Sea.

Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. (*He kneels.*) Now, by yond marble heaven,
In the due reverence of a sacred vow
I here engage my words.

IAGO. Do not rise yet. *Iago kneels.*
Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The execution of his wit, hands, heart
To wronged Othello's service! Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody business ever. [*They rise.*]

OTHELLO. I greet thy love,
Not with vain thanks but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to't.
Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.

IAGO. My friend is dead; 'tis done at your request.
But let her live.

OTHELLO. Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her!
Come, go with me apart. I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift means of death
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

IAGO. I am your own for ever. *Exeunt.*

Scene iv.

Enter Desdemona, Emilia, and Clown.

DESDEMONA. Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?

CLOWN. I dare not say he lies anywhere.

DESDEMONA. Why, man?

CLOWN. He's a soldier, and for me to say a soldier lies is stabbing.

DESDEMONA. Go to. Where lodges he?

459. capable: comprehensive. 468. remorse: duty of pity.

CLOWN. To tell you where he lodges is to tell you where I lie.
DESDEMONA. Can anything be made of this?
CLOWN. I know not where he lodges; and for me to devise a lodging, and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.
DESDEMONA. Can you enquire him out, and be edified by report?
CLOWN. I will catechize the world for him; that is, make questions, and by them answer.
DESDEMONA. Seek him, bid him come hither. Tell him I have moved my lord on his behalf and hope all will be well.
CLOWN. To do this is within the compass of man's wit, and therefore I'll attempt the doing of it. *Exit.*
DESDEMONA. Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?
EMILIA. I know not, madam.
DESDEMONA. Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
Full of crusadoes; and but my noble Moor
Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.
EMILIA. Is he not jealous?
DESDEMONA. Who? he? I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humors from him.

Enter Othello.

EMILIA. Look where he comes.
DESDEMONA. I will not leave him now till Cassio
Be called to him.—How is't with you, my lord?
OTHELLO. Well, my good lady. [*aside*] O, hardness to dissemble!—
How do you, Desdemona?
DESDEMONA. Well, my good lord.
OTHELLO. Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my lady.
DESDEMONA. It yet hath felt no age nor known no sorrow.
OTHELLO. This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.
Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours requires
A sequester from liberty, fasting and prayer,
Much castigation, exercise devout;

III. iv. 26. crusadoes: small Portuguese gold coins.
31. humors: moods. 36. moist: supposed to indicate sexual desire.
40. sequester: removal.

For here's a young and sweating devil here
That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
A frank one.

DESDEMONA. You may, indeed, say so;
For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart.

OTHELLO. A liberal hand! The hearts of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.

DESDEMONA. I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise!

OTHELLO. What promise, chuck?

DESDEMONA. I have sent to bid Cassio come speak with you.

OTHELLO. I have a salt and sorry rheum offends me.
Lend me thy handkerchief.

DESDEMONA. Here, my lord.

OTHELLO. That which I gave you.

DESDEMONA. I have it not about me.

OTHELLO. Not?

DESDEMONA. No, faith, my lord.

OTHELLO. That is a fault.
That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathly, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,
And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her. I did so; and take heed on't;
Make it a darling like your precious eye.
To lose't or give't away were such perdition
As nothing else could match.

DESDEMONA. Is't possible?

OTHELLO. 'Tis true. There's magic in the web of it.
A sibyl that had numbered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;

51. rheum: head cold. 56. Egyptian: gypsy.

The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk;
And it was dyed in mummy which the skillful
Conserved of maidens' hearts.
DESDEMONA. I' faith? Is't true?
OTHELLO. Most veritable. Therefore look to't well.
DESDEMONA. Then would to God that I had never seen't!
OTHELLO. Ha! Wherefore?
DESDEMONA. Why do you speak so startingly and rash?
OTHELLO. Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is it out o' th' way?
DESDEMONA. Heaven bless us!
OTHELLO. Say you?
DESDEMONA. It is not lost. But what an if it were?
OTHELLO. How?
DESDEMONA. I say it is not lost.
OTHELLO. Fetch't, let me see't!
DESDEMONA. Why, so I can, sir; but I will not now.
This is a trick to put me from my suit:
Pray you let Cassio be received again.
OTHELLO. Fetch me the handkerchief! My mind misgives.
DESDEMONA. Come, come!
You'll never meet a more sufficient man.
OTHELLO. The handkerchief!
DESDEMONA. I pray talk me of Cassio.
OTHELLO. The handkerchief!
DESDEMONA. A man that all his time
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
Shared dangers with you—
OTHELLO. The handkerchief!
DESDEMONA. I'faith, you are to blame.
OTHELLO. Zounds! *Exit.*
EMILIA. Is not this man jealous?
DESDEMONA. I ne'er saw this before.
Sure there's some wonder in this handkerchief;
I am most unhappy in the loss of it.
EMILIA. 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,
They belch us.

74. mummy: liquid drug supposedly derived from embalmed bodies.

Enter Iago and Cassio.

Look you—Cassio and my husband!

IAGO. There is no other way; 'tis she must do't.
And lo the happiness! Go and importune her.

DESDEMONA. How now, good Cassio? What's the news with you?

CASSIO. Madam, my former suit. I do beseech you
That by your virtuous means I may again
Exist, and be a member of his love
Whom I with all the office of my heart
Entirely honor. I would not be delayed.
If my offense be of such mortal kind
That neither service past, nor present sorrows,
Nor purposed merit in futurity,
Can ransom me into his love again,
But to know so must be my benefit.
So shall I clothe me in a forced content,
And shut myself up in some other course,
To fortune's alms.

DESDEMONA. Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio!
My advocation is not now in tune.
My lord is not my lord; nor should I know him,
Were he in favor as in humor altered.
So help me every spirit sanctified
As I have spoken for you all my best
And stood within the blank of his displeasure
For my free speech! You must awhile be patient.
What I can do I will; and more I will
Than for myself I dare. Let that suffice you.

IAGO. Is my lord angry?

EMILIA. He went hence but now,
And certainly in strange unquietness.

IAGO. Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon
When it hath blown his ranks into the air
And, like the devil, from his very arm
Puffed his own brother—and can he be angry?
Something of moment then. I will go meet him.
There's matter in't indeed if he be angry.

DESDEMONA. I prithee do so. *Exit* [*Iago*].

125. favor: appearance. 128. blank: bulls-eye, direct aim.

Something sure of state,
Either from Venice or some unhatched practice
Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
Hath puddled his clear spirit; and in such cases
Men's natures wrangle with inferior things,
Though great ones are their object. 'Tis even so;
For let our finger ache, and it endues
Our other, healthful members even to that sense
Of pain. Nay, we must think men are not gods,
Nor of them look for such observancy
As fits the bridal. Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was, unhandsome warrior as I am,
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborned the witness,
And he's indicted falsely.

EMILIA. Pray heaven it be state matters, as you think,
And no conception nor no jealous toy
Concerning you.

DESDEMONA. Alas the day! I never gave him cause.

EMILIA. But jealous souls will not be answered so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous. 'Tis a monster
Begot upon itself, born on itself.

DESDEMONA. Heaven keep that monster from Othello's mind!

EMILIA. Lady, amen.

DESDEMONA. I will go seek him. Cassio, walk here about:
If I do find him fit, I'll move your suit
And seek to effect it to my uttermost.

CASSIO. I humbly thank your ladyship.

Exeunt Desdemona and Emilia.

Enter Bianca.

BIANCA. Save you, friend Cassio!

CASSIO. What make you from home?
How is it with you, my most fair Bianca?
I' faith, sweet love, I was coming to your house.

BIANCA. And I was going to your lodging, Cassio.

141. unhatched practice: plot in the making.
152. Arraigning . . . soul: charging him too strictly with unkindness to me.

What, keep a week away? seven days and nights?
Eightscore eight hours? and lovers' absent hours,
More tedious than the dial eightscore times?
O weary reck'ning!

CASSIO. Pardon me, Bianca:
I have this while with leaden thoughts been pressed;
But I shall in a more continuate time
Strike off this score of absence. Sweet Bianca,
[*Gives her Desdemona's handkerchief.*]
Take me this work out.

BIANCA. O Cassio, whence came this?
This is some token from a newer friend.
To the felt absence now I feel a cause.
Is't come to this? Well, well.

CASSIO. Go to, woman!
Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth,
From whence you have them. You are jealous now
That this is from some mistress, some remembrance.
No, by my faith, Bianca.

BIANCA. Why, whose is it?

CASSIO. I know not, sweet; I found it in my chamber.
I like the work well; ere it be demanded,
As like enough it will, I'd have it copied.
Take it and do't, and leave me for this time.

BIANCA. Leave you? Wherefore?

CASSIO. I do attend here on the general
And think it no addition, nor my wish,
To have him see me womaned.

BIANCA. Why, I pray you?

CASSIO. Not that I love you not.

BIANCA. But that you do not love me!
I pray you bring me on the way a little,
And say if I shall see you soon at night.

CASSIO. 'Tis but a little way that I can bring you,
For I attend here; but I'll see you soon.

BIANCA. 'Tis very good. I must be circumstanced. *Exeunt.*

178. continuate: uninterrupted.
201. circumstanced: governed by circumstances.

Act IV. Scene i.

Enter Othello and Iago.

IAGO. Will you think so?
OTHELLO. Think so, Iago?
IAGO. What,
To kiss in private?
OTHELLO. An unauthorized kiss.
IAGO. Or to be naked with her friend in bed
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?
OTHELLO. Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?
It is hypocrisy against the devil.
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.
IAGO. So they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip.
But if I give my wife a handkerchief—
OTHELLO. What then?
IAGO. Why, then 'tis hers, my lord; and being hers,
She may, I think, bestow't on any man.
OTHELLO. She is protectress of her honor too;
May she give that?
IAGO. Her honor is an essence that's not seen;
They have it very oft that have it not.
But for the handkerchief—
OTHELLO. By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it!
Thou said'st—O, it comes o'er my memory
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all!—he had my handkerchief.
IAGO. Ay, what of that?
OTHELLO. That's not so good now.
IAGO. What
If I had said I had seen him do you wrong?
Or heard him say—as knaves be such abroad
Who having, by their own importunate suit,
Or voluntary dotage of some mistress,
Convincèd or supplied them, cannot choose

IV. i. 28. convincèd or supplied: won the suit (l. 26) or gratified the voluntary desires (l. 27).

But they must blab—

OTHELLO. Hath he said anything?

IAGO. He hath, my lord; but be you well assured,
No more than he'll unswear.

OTHELLO. What hath he said?

IAGO. Faith, that he did—I know not what he did.

OTHELLO. What? what?

IAGO. Lie—

OTHELLO. With her?

IAGO. With her, on her; what you will.

OTHELLO. Lie with her? lie on her?—We say lie on her when they belie her.—Lie with her! Zounds, that's fulsome.—Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!—To confess, and be hanged for his labor—first to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus.—Pish! Noses, ears, and lips? Is't possible?—Confess?—Handkerchief?—O devil! *Falls in a trance.*

IAGO. Work on,
My med'cine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach.—What, ho! my lord!
My lord, I say! Othello!

Enter Cassio.

How now, Cassio?

CASSIO. What's the matter?

IAGO. My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy.
This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.

CASSIO. Rub him about the temples.

IAGO. No, forbear.
The lethargy must have his quiet course.
If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by
Breaks out to savage madness. Look, he stirs.
Do you withdraw yourself a little while.
He will recover straight. When he is gone,
I would on great occasion speak with you. [*Exit Cassio.*]
How is it, general? Have you not hurt your head?

OTHELLO. Dost thou mock me?

37. fulsome: nauseating. 40–41. instruction: reasonable cause.

IAGO. I mock you? No, by heaven.
Would you would bear your fortune like a man!
OTHELLO. A hornèd man's a monster and a beast.
IAGO. There's many a beast then in a populous city,
And many a civil monster.
OTHELLO. Did he confess it?
IAGO. Good, sir, be a man.
Think every bearded fellow that's but yoked
May draw with you. There's millions now alive
That nightly lie in those unproper beds
Which they dare swear peculiar: your case is better.
O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's arch-mock,
To lip a wanton in a secure couch,
And to suppose her chaste! No, let me know;
And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.
OTHELLO. O, thou are wise! 'Tis certain.
IAGO. Stand you awhile apart;
Confine yourself but in a patient list.
Whilst you were here, o'erwhelmèd with your grief—
A passion most unsuiting such a man—
Cassio came hither. I shifted him away
And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy;
Bade him anon return, and here speak with me;
The which he promised. Do but encave yourself
And mark the fleers, the gibes, and notable scorns
That dwell in every region of his face;
For I will make him tell the tale anew—
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
He hath, and is again to cope your wife.
I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience!
Or I shall say you are all in all in spleen,
And nothing of a man.
OTHELLO. Dost thou hear, Iago?
I will be found most cunning in my patience;
But—dost thou hear?—most bloody.
IAGO. That's not amiss;
But yet keep time in all. Will you withdraw?

[*Othello retires.*]

69. unproper: not exclusively their own.
76. a patient list: the bounds of patience. 80. ecstasy: trance.

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,
A huswife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature
That dotes on Cassio, as 'tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one.
He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes.
As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;
And his unbookish jealousy must conster
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behavior
Quite in the wrong. How do you now, lieutenant?

CASSIO. The worser that you give me the addition
Whose want even kills me.

IAGO. Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on't.
Now, if this suit lay in Bianca's power,
How quickly should you speed!

CASSIO. Alas, poor caitiff!

OTHELLO. Look how he laughs already!

IAGO. I never knew a woman love man so.

CASSIO. Alas, poor rogue! I think, i' faith, she loves me.

OTHELLO. Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out.

IAGO. Do you hear, Cassio?

OTHELLO. Now he importunes him
To tell it o'er. Go to! Well said, well said!

IAGO. She gives it out that you shall marry her.
Do you intend it?

CASSIO. Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO. Do you triumph, Roman? Do you triumph?

CASSIO. I marry her? What, a customer? Prithee bear some charity to my wit; do not think it so unwholesome. Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO. So, so, so, so! They laugh that win!

IAGO. Faith, the cry goes that you shall marry her.

CASSIO. Prithee say true.

IAGO. I am a very villain else.

OTHELLO. Have you scored me? Well.

CASSIO. This is the monkey's own giving out. She is persuaded I

102. unbookish: inexperienced. Conster: construe.
105. addition: title (lieutenant). 109. caitiff: poor wretch.
121. Roman: perhaps from association with Roman triumphs over barbarian Africans.
123. customer: prostitute.

will marry her out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.

OTHELLO. Iago beckons me; now he begins the story.

CASSIO. She was here even now; she haunts me in every place. I was t' other day talking on the sea bank with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble, and, by this hand, she falls me thus about my neck—

OTHELLO. Crying 'O dear Cassio!' as it were. His gesture imports it.

CASSIO. So hangs, and lolls, and weeps upon me; so hales and pulls me! Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO. Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw't to.

CASSIO. Well, I must leave her company.

Enter Bianca.

IAGO. Before me! Look where she comes.

CASSIO. 'Tis such another fitchew! marry, a perfumed one. What do you mean by this haunting of me?

BIANCA. Let the devil and his dam haunt you! What did you mean by that same handkerchief you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it. I must take out the whole work? A likely piece of work that you should find it in your chamber and know not who left it there! This is some minx's token, and I must take out the work? There! Give it your hobby-horse. Wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on't.

CASSIO. How now, my sweet Bianca? How now? how now?

OTHELLO. By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!

BIANCA. An you'll come to supper to-night, you may; an you will not, come when you are next prepared for. *Exit.*

IAGO. After her, after her!

CASSIO. Faith, I must; she'll rail i' th' street else.

IAGO. Will you sup there?

CASSIO. Yes, I intend so.

IAGO. Well, I may chance to see you; for I would very fain speak with you.

CASSIO. Prithee come. Will you?

150. fitchew: polecat, used figuratively for *whore* because of its strong smell and lechery.
160. hobby-horse: harlot.

IAGO. Go to! say no more. *Exit Cassio.*

OTHELLO. [*comes forward*] How shall I murder him, Iago?

IAGO. Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice?

OTHELLO. O Iago!

IAGO. And did you see the handkerchief?

OTHELLO. Was that mine?

IAGO. Yours, by this hand! And to see how he prizes the foolish woman your wife! She gave it him, and he hath giv'n it his whore.

OTHELLO. I would have him nine years a-killing!—A fine woman! a fair woman! a sweet woman!

IAGO. Nay, you must forget that.

OTHELLO. Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned to-night; for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature! She might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.

IAGO. Nay, that's not your way.

OTHELLO. Hang her! I do but say what she is. So delicate with her needle! an admirable musician! O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear! Of so high and plenteous wit and invention—

IAGO. She's the worse for all this.

OTHELLO. O, a thousand thousand times! And then, of so gentle a condition!

IAGO. Ay, too gentle.

OTHELLO. Nay, that's certain. But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!

IAGO. If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her patent to offend; for if it touch not you, it comes near nobody.

OTHELLO. I will chop her into messes! Cuckold me!

IAGO. O, 'tis foul in her.

OTHELLO. With mine officer!

IAGO. That's fouler.

OTHELLO. Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago!

IAGO. Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.

OTHELLO. Good, good! The justice of it pleases. Very good!

IAGO. And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker: you shall hear more by midnight.

OTHELLO. Excellent good! *A trumpet.*
What trumpet is that same?
IAGO. Something from Venice, sure.

Enter Lodovico, Desdemona, and Attendants.

'Tis Lodovico,
Come from the duke; and see, your wife is with him.
LODOVICO. God save you, worthy general!
OTHELLO. With all my heart, sir.
LODOVICO. The duke and senators of Venice greet you.
[*Gives him a letter.*]
OTHELLO. I kiss the instrument of their pleasures.
[*Opens the letter and reads.*]
DESDEMONA. And what's the news, good cousin Lodovico?
IAGO. I am very glad to see you, signior.
Welcome to Cyprus.
LODOVICO. I thank you. How does Lieutenant Cassio?
IAGO. Lives, sir.
DESDEMONA. Cousin, there's fall'n between him and my lord
An unkind breach; but you shall make all well.
OTHELLO. Are you sure of that?
DESDEMONA. My lord?
OTHELLO. [*reads*] 'This fail you not to do, as you will—' 240
LODOVICO. He did not call; he's busy in the paper.
Is there division 'twixt thy lord and Cassio?
DESDEMONA. A most unhappy one. I would do much
T' atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.
OTHELLO. Fire and brimstone!
DESDEMONA. My lord?
OTHELLO. Are you wise? 245
DESDEMONA. What, is he angry?
LODOVICO. May be the letter moved him;
For, as I think, they do command him home,
Deputing Cassio in his government.
DESDEMONA. By my troth, I am glad on't.
OTHELLO. Indeed?
DESDEMONA. My lord?
OTHELLO. I am glad to see you mad.
DESDEMONA. Why, sweet Othello— 250
OTHELLO. Devil! [*Strikes her.*]

DESDEMONA. I have not deserved this.
LODOVICO. My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
Though I should swear I saw't. 'Tis very much.
Make her amends; she weeps.
OTHELLO. O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem with woman's tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.
Out of my sight!
DESDEMONA. I will not stay to offend you. [*Going.*]
LODOVICO. Truly, an obedient lady.
I do beseech your lordship call her back.
OTHELLO. Mistress!
DESDEMONA. My lord?
OTHELLO. What would you with her, sir?
LODOVICO. Who? I, my lord?
OTHELLO. Ay! You did wish that I would make her turn.
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on
And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
And she's obedient; as you say, obedient,
Very obedient.—Proceed you in your tears.—
Concerning this, sir—O well-painted passion!—
I am commanded home.—Get you away;
I'll send for you anon.—Sir, I obey the mandate
And will return to Venice.—Hence, avaunt!
[*Exit Desdemona.*]
Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, to-night
I do entreat that we may sup together.
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and monkeys!
Exit.
LODOVICO. Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce?
IAGO. He is much changed.
LODOVICO. Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain?
IAGO. He's that he is; I may not breathe my censure.
What he might be (if, what he might, he is not)
I would to heaven he were!
LODOVICO. What, strike his wife?

IAGO. Faith, that was not so well; yet would I knew
That stroke would prove the worst!
LODOVICO. Is it his use?
Or did the letter works upon his blood
And new-create this fault?
IAGO. Alas, alas!
It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known. You shall observe him,
And his own courses will denote him so
That I may save my speech. Do but go after
And mark how he continues.
LODOVICO. I am sorry that I am deceived in him. *Exeunt.*

Scene ii.

Enter Othello and Emilia.

OTHELLO. You have seen nothing then?
EMILIA. Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.
OTHELLO. Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.
EMILIA. But then I saw no harm, and then I heard
Each syllable that breath made up between them.
OTHELLO. What, did they never whisper?
EMILIA. Never, my lord.
OTHELLO. Nor send you out o' th' way?
EMILIA. Never.
OTHELLO. To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor nothing?
EMILIA. Never, my lord.
OTHELLO. That's strange.
EMILIA. I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake. If you think other,
Remove your thought; it doth abuse your bosom.
If any wretch have put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!
For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There's no man happy; the purest of their wives
Is foul as slander.
OTHELLO. Bid her come hither. Go. *Exit Emilia.*
She says enough; yet she's a simple bawd
That cannot say as much. This is a subtle whore,

A closet lock and key of villainous secrets;
And yet she'll kneel and pray; I have seen her do't.

Enter Desdemona and Emilia.

DESDEMONA. My lord, what is your will?
OTHELLO. Pray, chuck, come hither.
DESDEMONA. What is your pleasure?
OTHELLO. Let me see your eyes.
Look in my face.
DESDEMONA. What horrible fancy's this?
OTHELLO. [*to Emilia*] Some of your function, mistress.
Leave procreants alone and shut the door;
Cough or cry hem if anybody come.
Your mystery, your mystery! Nay, dispatch!
Exit Emilia.
DESDEMONA. Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?
I understand a fury in your words,
[But not the words.]
OTHELLO. Why, what art thou?
DESDEMONA. Your wife, my lord; your true
And loyal wife.
OTHELLO. Come, swear it, damn thyself;
Lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee. Therefore be double-damned—
Swear thou art honest.
DESDEMONA. Heaven doth truly know it.
OTHELLO. Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell.
DESDEMONA. To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false?
OTHELLO. Ah, Desdemon! away! away! away!
DESDEMONA. Alas the heavy day! Why do you weep?
Am I the motive of these tears, my lord?
If haply you my father do suspect
An instrument of this your calling back,
Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost him,
Why, I have lost him too.
OTHELLO. Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction, had they rained
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,

IV. ii. 27. Some of your function: get to work (as madam of a brothel). 30. Mystery: trade, occupation.

Steeped me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience. But, alas, to make me
A fixèd figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at!
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well.
But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or bear no life,
The fountain from the which my current runs
Or else dries up—to be discarded thence,
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in—turn thy complexion there,
Patience, thou young and rose-lipped cherubin!
Ay, there look grim as hell!

DESDEMONA. I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.

OTHELLO. O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,
That quicken even with blowing. O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet,
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne'er been born!

DESDEMONA. Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?

OTHELLO. Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write 'whore' upon? What committed?
Committed? O thou public commoner!
I should make very forges of my cheeks
That would to cinders burn up modesty,
Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed?
Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks;
The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
And will not hear it. What committed?
Impudent strumpet!

55. F has "slow, and moving."
62. turn thy complexion there: change color (turn pale) at that.
63. Patience . . . cherubin: sometimes glossed as referring to Patience (personified), one of God's angels, but probably *cherubin* refers to Desdemona, and Othello is cruelly instructing her to face up to and react properly to his charges.
66. shambles: slaughterhouses.
67. quicken . . . blowing: are fertilized again as soon as they deposit their eggs.
77. winks: closes her eyes.

DESDEMONA. By heaven, you do me wrong!
OTHELLO. Are not you a strumpet?
DESDEMONA. No, as I am a Christian!
If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.
OTHELLO. What, not a whore?
DESDEMONA. No, as I shall be saved!
OTHELLO. Is't possible?
DESDEMONA. O, heaven forgive us!
OTHELLO. I cry you mercy then.
I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello.—[*calling*] You, mistress,
That have the office opposite to Saint Peter
And keep the gate of hell!

Enter Emilia.

You, you, ay, you!
We have done our course; there's money for your pains:
I pray you turn the key, and keep our counsel. *Exit.*
EMILIA. Alas, what does this gentleman conceive?
How do you, madam? How do you, my good lady?
DESDEMONA. Faith, half asleep.
EMILIA. Good madam, what's the matter with my lord?
DESDEMONA. With who?
EMILIA. Why, with my lord, madam.
DESDEMONA. Who is thy lord?
EMILIA. He that is yours, sweet lady.
DESDEMONA. I have none. Do not talk to me, Emilia.
I cannot weep; nor answer have I none
But what should go by water. Prithee to-night
Lay on my bed my wedding sheets, remember;
And call thy husband hither.
EMILIA. Here's a change indeed! *Exit.*
DESDEMONA. 'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
How have I been behaved, that he might stick
The small'st opinion on my least misuse?

Enter Iago and Emilia.

84. other: Q has "hated." 104. water: tears (i.e., uselessly).

IAGO. What is your pleasure, madam? How is't with you?
DESDEMONA. I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes
Do it with gentle means and easy tasks:
He might have chid me so; for, in good faith,
I am a child to chiding.
IAGO. What is the matter, lady?
EMILIA. Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored her,
Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her
As true hearts cannot bear.
DESDEMONA. Am I that name, Iago?
IAGO. What name, fair lady?
DESDEMONA. Such as she says my lord did say I was.
EMILIA. He called her whore. A beggar in his drink
Could not have laid such terms upon his callet.
IAGO. Why did he so?
DESDEMONA. I do not know; I am sure I am none such.
IAGO. Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day!
EMILIA. Hath she forsook so many noble matches,
Her father and her country, all her friends,
To be called whore? Would it not make one weep?
DESDEMONA. It is my wretched fortune.
IAGO. Beshrew him for't!
How comes this trick upon him?
DESDEMONA. Nay, heaven doth know.
EMILIA. I will be hanged if some eternal villain,
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,
Have not devised this slander. I'll be hanged else.
IAGO. Fie, there is no such man! It is impossible.
DESDEMONA. If any such there be, heaven pardon him!
EMILIA. A halter pardon him! and hell gnaw his bones!
Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company?
What place? what time? what form? what likelihood?
The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow.
O heaven, that such companions thou'dst unfold,
And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascals naked through the world

121. callet: slut. 132. cogging, cozening: cheating.
141. unfold: expose.

Even from the east to th' west!

IAGO. Speak within door.

EMILIA. O, fie upon them! Some such squire he was
That turned your wit the seamy side without
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

IAGO. You are a fool. Go to.

DESDEMONA. O good Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:
If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense
Delighted them in any other form,
Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
And ever will (though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement) love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love. I cannot say 'whore.'
It doth abhor me now I speak the word;
To do the act that might th' addition earn
Not the world's mass of vanity could make me.

IAGO. I pray you be content. 'Tis but his humor.
The business of the state does him offense,
[And he does chide with you.]

DESDEMONA. If 'twere no other—

IAGO. 'Tis but so, I warrant.
[*Trumpets within.*]
Hark how these instruments summon you to supper.
The messengers of Venice stay the meat:
Go in, and weep not. All things shall be well.
[*Exeunt Desdemona and Emilia.*]

Enter Roderigo.

How now, Roderigo?

RODERIGO. I do not find that thou deal'st justly with me.

IAGO. What in the contrary?

RODERIGO. Every day thou daff'st me with some device, Iago, and rather, as it seems to me now, keep'st from me all conveniency

than suppliest me with the least advantage of hope. I will indeed no longer endure it; nor am I yet persuaded to put up in peace what already I have foolishly suffered.

IAGO. Will you hear me, Roderigo?

RODERIGO. Faith, I have heard too much; for your words and performance are no kin together.

IAGO. You charge me most unjustly.

RODERIGO. With naught but truth. I have wasted myself out of means. The jewels you have had from me to deliver to Desdemona would half have corrupted a votarist. You have told me she hath received them, and returned me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and acquaintance; but I find none.

IAGO. Well, go to; very well.

RODERIGO. Very well! go to! I cannot go to, man; nor 'tis not very well. By this hand, I say 'tis very scurvy, and begin to find myself fopped in it.

IAGO. Very well.

RODERIGO. I tell you 'tis not very well. I will make myself known to Desdemona. If she will return me my jewels, I will give over my suit and repent my unlawful solicitation; if not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction of you.

IAGO. You have said now.

RODERIGO. Ay, and said nothing but what I protest intendment of doing.

IAGO. Why, now I see there's mettle in thee; and even from this instant do build on thee a better opinion than ever before. Give me thy hand, Roderigo. Thou hast taken against me a most just exception; but yet I protest I have dealt most directly in thy affair.

RODERIGO. It hath not appeared.

IAGO. I grant indeed it hath not appeared, and your suspicion is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed which I have greater reason to believe now than ever, I mean purpose, courage, and valor, this night show it. If thou the next night following enjoy not Desdemona, take me from this world with treachery and devise engines for my life.

RODERIGO. Well, what is it? Is it within reason and compass?

IAGO. Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute Cassio in Othello's place.

190. votarist: nun. 197. fopped: duped.

RODERIGO. Is that true? Why, then Othello and Desdemona return again to Venice.

IAGO. O, no; he goes into Mauritania and takes away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident; wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio.

RODERIGO. How do you mean removing of him?

IAGO. Why, by making him uncapable of Othello's place—knocking out his brains.

RODERIGO. And that you would have me to do?

IAGO. Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right. He sups to-night with a harlotry, and thither will I go to him. He knows not yet of his honorable fortune. If you will watch his going thence, which I will fashion to fall out between twelve and one, you may take him at your pleasure. I will be near to second your attempt, and he shall fall between us. Come, stand not amazed at it, but go along with me. I will show you such a necessity in his death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on him. It is now high supper time, and the night grows to waste. About it!

RODERIGO. I will hear further reason for this.

IAGO. And you shall be satisfied. *Exeunt.*

SCENE iii.

Enter Othello, Lodovico, Desdemona, Emilia, and Attendants.

LODOVICO. I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further.

OTHELLO. O, pardon me; 'twill do me good to walk.

LODOVICO. Madam, good night. I humbly thank your ladyship.

DESDEMONA. Your honor is most welcome.

OTHELLO. Will you walk, sir?
O, Desdemona—

DESDEMONA. My lord?

OTHELLO. Get you to bed on th' instant; I will be returned forthwith. Dismiss your attendant there. Look't be done.

DESDEMONA. I will, my lord.

Exit [*Othello, with Lodovico and Attendants.*]

EMILIA. How goes it now? He looks gentler than he did.

DESDEMONA. He says he will return incontinent.

He hath commanded me to go to bed,
And bade me to dismiss you.
EMILIA. Dismiss me?
DESDEMONA. It was his bidding; therefore, good Emilia,
Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu.
We must not now displease him.
EMILIA. I would you had never seen him!
DESDEMONA. So would not I. My love doth so approve him
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—
Prithee unpin me—have grace and favor in them.
EMILIA. I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.
DESDEMONA. All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!
If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me
In one of those same sheets.
EMILIA. Come, come! You talk.
DESDEMONA. My mother had a maid called Barbary.
She was in love; and he she loved proved mad
And did forsake her. She had a song of 'Willow';
An old thing 'twas; but it expressed her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song to-night
Will not go from my mind; I have much to do
But to go hang my head all at one side
And sing it like poor Barbary. Prithee dispatch.
EMILIA. Shall I go fetch your nightgown?
DESDEMONA. No, unpin me here.
This Lodovico is a proper man.
EMILIA. A very handsome man.
DESDEMONA. He speaks well.
EMILIA. I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to
Palestine for a touch of his nether lip.
DESDEMONA. (*sings*)
'The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow.
The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her moans;
Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her, and soft'ned the stones'—
Lay by these.

IV. iii. 34. nightgown: robe.

'Sing willow, willow, willow'—
Prithee hie thee; he'll come anon.
'Sing all a green willow must be my garland.
Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve'—
Nay, that's not next. Hark! who is't that knocks?

EMILIA. It is the wind.

DESDEMONA. [*sings*]
'I called my love false love; but what said he then?
Sing willow, willow, willow:
If I court moe women, you'll couch with moe men.'
So, get thee gone; good night. Mine eyes do itch.
Doth that bode weeping?

EMILIA. 'Tis neither here nor there.

DESDEMONA. I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men!
Dost thou in conscience think—tell me, Emilia—
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?

EMILIA. There be some such, no question.

DESDEMONA. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

EMILIA. Why, would not you?

DESDEMONA. No, by this heavenly light!

EMILIA. Nor I neither by this heavenly light.
I might do't as well i' th' dark.

DESDEMONA. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

EMILIA. The world's a huge thing; it is a great price for a small vice.

DESDEMONA. Good troth, I think thou wouldst not.

EMILIA. By my troth, I think I should; and undo't when I had done it. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition; but, for all the whole world—'Ud's pity! who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't.

DESDEMONA. Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong
For the whole world.

EMILIA. Why, the wrong is but a wrong i' th' world; and having the world for your labor, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right.

73. lawn: fine linen.

DESDEMONA. I do not think there is any such woman.
EMILIA. Yes, a dozen; and as many to th' vantage as would store the world they played for.
But I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite—
Why, we have galls; and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them. They see, and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well; else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.
DESDEMONA. Good night, good night. God me such usage send,
Not to pick from bad, but by bad mend! *Exeunt.*

Act V. Scene i.

Enter Iago and Roderigo.

IAGO. Here, stand behind this bulk; straight will he come.
Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home.
Quick, quick! Fear nothing; I'll be at thy elbow.
It makes us, or it mars us—think on that,
And fix most firm thy resolution.
RODERIGO. Be near at hand; I may miscarry in't.
IAGO. Here, at thy hand. Be bold, and take thy stand.
[*Stands aside.*]
RODERIGO. I have no great devotion to the deed,
And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons.

85. to th' vantage: besides. V. i. 1. bulk: projecting store front.

'Tis but a man gone. Forth my sword! He dies!
IAGO. I have rubbed this young quat almost to the sense,
And he grows angry. Now whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels that I bobbed from him
As gifts to Desdemona.
It must not be. If Cassio do remain,
He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly; and besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril.
No, he must die. Be't so! I hear him coming.

Enter Cassio.

RODERIGO. I know his gait. 'Tis he. Villain, thou diest!
[*Makes a pass at Cassio.*]
CASSIO. That thrust had been mine enemy indeed
But that my coat is better than thou know'st.
I will make proof of thine. [*Draws, and wounds Roderigo.*]
RODERIGO. O, I am slain!
[*Iago darts from concealment behind Cassio, wounds him in the leg, and exit.*]
CASSIO. I am maimed for ever. Help, ho! Murder! murder!
[*Falls.*]

Enter Othello.

OTHELLO. The voice of Cassio. Iago keeps his word.
RODERIGO. O, villain that I am!
OTHELLO. It is even so.
CASSIO. O, help, ho! light! a surgeon!
OTHELLO. 'Tis he. O brave Iago, honest and just,
That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!
Thou teachest me. Minion, your dear lies dead,
And your unblest fate hies. Strumpet, I come.
Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted.
Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted.

Exit.

11. quat: pimple. to the sense: raw. 33. Minion: mistress.
34. hies: hurries on.

Enter Lodovico and Gratiano.

CASSIO. What, ho? No watch? No passage? Murder! murder!
GRATIANO. 'Tis some mischance. The cry is very direful.
CASSIO. O, help!
LODOVICO. Hark!
RODERIGO. O wretched villain!
LODOVICO. Two or three groan. It is a heavy night.
These may be counterfeits. Let's think't unsafe
To come in to the cry without more help.
RODERIGO. Nobody come? Then shall I bleed to death.
LODOVICO. Hark!

Enter Iago, with a light.

GRATIANO. Here's one comes in his shirt, with light and weapons.
IAGO. Who's there? Whose noise is this that cries on murder?
LODOVICO. We do not know.
IAGO. Did not you hear a cry?
CASSIO. Here, here! For heaven's sake, help me!
IAGO. What's the matter?
GRATIANO. This is Othello's ancient, as I take it.
LODOVICO. The same indeed, a very valiant fellow.
IAGO. What are you here that cry so grievously?
CASSIO. Iago? O, I am spoiled, undone by villains!
Give me some help.
IAGO. O me, lieutenant! What villains have done this?
CASSIO. I think that one of them is hereabout
And cannot make away.
IAGO. O treacherous villains!
[*To Lodovico and Gratiano*] What are you there? Come in, and give some help.
RODERIGO. O, help me here!
CASSIO. That's one of them.
IAGO. O murd'rous slave! O villain!
[*Stabs Roderigo.*]
RODERIGO. O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!
IAGO. Kill men i' th' dark?—Where be these bloody thieves?—
How silent is this town!—Ho! murder! murder!—
What may you be? Are you of good or evil?
LODOVICO. As you shall prove us, praise us.

IAGO. Signior Lodovico?
LODOVICO. He, sir.
IAGO. I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains.
GRATIANO. Cassio?
IAGO. How is it, brother?
CASSIO. My leg is cut in two.
IAGO. Marry, heaven forbid!
Light, gentlemen. I'll bind it with my shirt.

Enter Bianca.

BIANCA. What is the matter, ho? Who is't that cried?
IAGO. Who is't that cried?
BIANCA. O my dear Cassio! my sweet Cassio!
O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!
IAGO. O notable strumpet!—Cassio, may you suspect
Who they should be that thus have mangled you?
CASSIO. No.
GRATIANO. I am sorry to find you thus. I have been to seek you.
IAGO. Lend me a garter. So. O for a chair
To bear him easily hence!
BIANCA. Alas, he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!
IAGO. Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash
To be a party in this injury.—
Patience awhile, good Cassio.—Come, come!
Lend me a light. Know we this face or no?
Alas, my friend and my dear countryman
Roderigo? No.—Yes, sure.—O heaven, Roderigo!
GRATIANO. What, of Venice?
IAGO. Even he, sir. Did you know him?
GRATIANO. Know him? Ay.
IAGO. Signior Gratiano? I cry you gentle pardon.
These bloody accidents must excuse my manners
That so neglected you.
GRATIANO. I am glad to see you.
IAGO. How do you, Cassio?—O, a chair, a chair!
GRATIANO. Roderigo?
IAGO. He, he, 'tis he! [*A chair brought in.*] O, that's well said; the chair.
Some good man bear him carefully from hence.
I'll fetch the general's surgeon. [*to Bianca*] For you, mistress,
Save you your labor.—He that lies slain here, Cassio,

Was my dear friend. What malice was between you?
CASSIO. None in the world; nor do I know the man.
IAGO. [to Bianca] What, look you pale?—O, bear him out o' th' air. [*Cassio and Roderigo are borne off.*]
Stay you, good gentlemen.—Look you pale, mistress?—
Do you perceive the gastness of her eye?—
Nay, if you stare, we shall hear more anon.
Behold her well; I pray you look upon her.
Do you see, gentlemen? Nay, guiltiness will speak,
Though tongues were out of use.

Enter Emilia.

EMILIA. 'Las, what's the matter? What's the matter, husband?
IAGO. Cassio hath here been set on in the dark
By Roderigo, and fellows that are scaped.
He's almost slain, and Roderigo dead.
EMILIA. Alas, good gentleman! alas, good Cassio!
IAGO. This is the fruit of whoring. Prithee, Emilia,
Go know of Cassio where he supped to-night.
[*To Bianca*] What, do you shake at that?
BIANCA. He supped at my house; but I therefore shake not.
IAGO. O, did he so? I charge you go with me.
EMILIA. Fie, fie upon thee, strumpet!
BIANCIA. I am no strumpet, but of life as honest
As you that thus abuse me.
EMILIA. As I? Foh! fie upon thee!
IAGO. Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio dressed.
[*To Bianca*] Come, mistress, you must tell's another tale.
Emilia, run you to the citadel
And tell my lord and lady what hath happed. [*Exit Emilia.*]
Will you go on afore? *Exeunt* [*all but Iago*].
This is the night
That either makes me or fordoes me quite. [*Exit.*]

Scene ii.

Desdemona [*asleep*] *in her bed. Enter Othello with a light.*

OTHELLO. It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!

106. gastness: terror.

It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light.
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have plucked the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again;
It needs must wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.

He kisses her.

O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more!
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after. One more, and this the last!
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

DESDEMONA. Who's there? Othello?

OTHELLO. Ay, Desdemona.

DESDEMONA. Will you come to bed, my lord?

OTHELLO. Have you prayed to-night, Desdemon?

DESDEMONA. Ay, my lord.

OTHELLO. If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.

DESDEMONA. Alack, my lord, what may you mean by that?

OTHELLO. Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by.
I would not kill thy unprepared spirit.
No, heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.

DESDEMONA. Talk you of killing?

OTHELLO. Ay, I do.

DESDEMONA. Then heaven
Have mercy on me!

OTHELLO. Amen, with all my heart!

DESDEMONA. If you say so, I hope you will not kill me.

OTHELLO. Hum!

DESDEMONA. And yet I fear you; for you are fatal then
When your eyes roll so. Why I should fear I know not,
Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I fear.
OTHELLO. Think on thy sins.
DESDEMONA. They are loves I bear to you.
OTHELLO. Ay, and for that thou diest.
DESDEMONA. That death's unnatural that kills for loving.
Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?
Some bloody passion shakes your very frame.
These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,
They do not point on me.
OTHELLO. Peace and be still!
DESDEMONA. I will so. What's the matter?
OTHELLO. That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee
Thou gav'st to Cassio.
DESDEMONA. No, by my life and soul!
Send for the man and ask him.
OTHELLO. Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy deathbed.
DESDEMONA. Ay, but not yet to die.
OTHELLO. Yes, presently.
Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;
For to deny each article with oath
Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception
That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.
DESDEMONA. Then Lord have mercy on me!
OTHELLO. I say amen.
DESDEMONA. And have you mercy too! I never did
Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio
But with such general warranty of heaven
As I might love. I never gave him token.
OTHELLO. By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand!
O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,
And mak'st me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.
I saw the handkerchief.
DESDEMONA. He found it then.
I never gave it him. Send for him hither.
Let him confess a truth.
OTHELLO. He hath confessed.

DESDEMONA. What, my lord?
OTHELLO. That he hath used thee.
DESDEMONA. How? unlawfully?
OTHELLO. Ay.
DESDEMONA. He will not say so.
OTHELLO. No, his mouth is stopped.
Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.
DESDEMONA. O, my fear interprets. What, is he dead?
OTHELLO. Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
Had stomach for them all.
DESDEMONA. Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone!
OTHELLO. Out, strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my face?
DESDEMONA. O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!
OTHELLO. Down, strumpet!
DESDEMONA. Kill me to-morrow; let me live to-night!
OTHELLO. Nay, an you strive—
DESDEMONA. But half an hour!
OTHELLO. Being done, there is no pause.
DESDEMONA. But while I say one prayer!
OTHELLO. It is too late.

Smothers her.

[DESDEMONA. O Lord, Lord, Lord!]

Emilia at the door.

EMILIA. (*calls within*) My lord, my lord! What, ho, my lord, my lord!
OTHELLO. What noise is this? Not dead? not yet quite dead?
I that am cruel am yet merciful;
I would not have thee linger in thy pain.
So, so.
EMILIA. (*within*) What, ho! my lord, my lord!
OTHELLO. Who's there?
EMILIA. [*within*] O, good my lord, I would speak a word with you!
OTHELLO. Yes, 'tis Emilia.—By and by.—She's dead.—
'Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio's death.
The noise was here. Ha! no more moving?
Still as the grave.—Shall she come in? Were't good?—
I think she stirs again. No.—What's best to do?
If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife.

My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.
O, insupportable! O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that th' affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration.
EMILIA. [*within*] I do beseech you
That I may speak with you, O good my lord!
OTHELLO. I had forgot thee. O, come in, Emilia.
Soft, by and by.—Let me the curtains draw.—
[*Closes the bed-curtains.*]
Where art thou? [*Opens the door.*]

Enter Emilia.

What's the matter with thee now?
EMILIA. O my good lord, yonder's foul murder done!
OTHELLO. What? Now?
EMILIA. But now, my lord.
OTHELLO. It is the very error of the moon.
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont
And makes men mad.
EMILIA. Cassio, my lord, hath killed a young Venetian
Called Roderigo.
OTHELLO. Roderigo killed?
And Cassio killed?
EMILIA. No, Cassio is not killed.
OTHELLO. Not Cassio killed? Then murder's out of tune,
And sweet revenge grows harsh.
DESDEMONA. O, falsely, falsely murdered!
EMILIA. O Lord! what cry is that?
OTHELLO. That? What?
EMILIA. Out and alas! that was my lady's voice.
Help! help, ho! help! O lady, speak again!
Sweet Desdemona! O sweet mistress, speak!
DESDEMONA. A guiltless death I die.
EMILIA. O, who hath done this deed?
DESDEMONA. Nobody—I myself. Farewell.
Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell! *She dies.*
OTHELLO. Why, how should she be murd'red?
EMILIA. Alas, who knows?
OTHELLO. You heard her say herself, it was not I.

EMILIA. She said so. I must needs report the truth.
OTHELLO. She's like a liar gone to burning hell!
'Twas I that killed her.
EMILIA. O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil!
OTHELLO. She turned to folly, and she was a whore.
EMILIA. Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil.
OTHELLO. She was false as water.
EMILIA. Thou art rash as fire to say
That she was false. O, she was heavenly true!
OTHELLO. Cassio did top her. Ask thy husband else.
O, I were damned beneath all depth in hell
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity. Thy husband knew it all.
EMILIA. My husband?
OTHELLO. Thy husband.
EMILIA. That she was false to wedlock?
OTHELLO. Ay, with Cassio. Nay, had she been true,
If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'ld not have sold her for it.
EMILIA. My husband?
OTHELLO. Ay, 'twas he that told me first.
An honest man he is, and hates the slime
That sticks on filthy deeds.
EMILIA. My husband?
OTHELLO. What needs this iterance? Woman, I say thy husband.
EMILIA. O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with love!
My husband say that she was false?
OTHELLO. He, woman.
I say, thy husband. Dost understand the word?
My friend, thy husband; honest, honest Iago.
EMILIA. If he say so, may his pernicious soul
Rot half a grain a day! he lies to th' heart.
She was too fond of her most filthy bargain.
OTHELLO. Ha!
EMILIA. Do thy worst.
This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven
Than thou wast worthy her.
OTHELLO. Peace, you were best.

EMILIA. Thou hast not half the power to do me harm
As I have to be hurt. O gull! O dolt!
As ignorant as dirt! thou hast done a deed—
I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known,
Though I lost twenty lives. Help! help! O, help!
The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder! murder!

Enter Montano, Gratiano, Iago, and Others.

MONTANO. What is the matter? How now, general?
EMILIA. O, are you come, Iago? You have done well,
That men must lay their murders on your neck.
GRATIANO. What is the matter?
EMILIA. Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man.
He says thou told'st him that his wife was false.
I know thou didst not; thou'rt not such a villain.
Speak, for my heart is full.
IAGO. I told him what I thought, and told no more
Than what he found himself was apt and true.
EMILIA. But did you ever tell him she was false?
IAGO. I did.
EMILIA. You told a lie, an odious damnèd lie!
Upon my soul, a lie! a wicked lie!
She false with Cassio? Did you say with Cassio?
IAGO. With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your tongue.
EMILIA. I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak:
My mistress here lies murdered in her bed—
ALL. O heavens forfend!
EMILIA. And your reports have set the murder on.
OTHELLO. Nay, stare not, masters. It is true indeed.
GRATIANO. 'Tis a strange truth.
MONTANO. O monstrous act!
EMILIA. Villainy, villainy, villainy!
I think upon't—I think I smell't!—O villainy!
I thought so then.—I'll kill myself for grief.—
O villainy, villainy!
IAGO. What, are you mad? I charge you get you home.
EMILIA. Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak.
'Tis proper I obey him, but not now.
Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home.
OTHELLO. O! O! O! *Falls on the bed.*

EMILIA. Nay, lay thee down and roar!
For thou hast killed the sweetest innocent
That e'er did lift up eye.
OTHELLO. O, she was foul! [*Rises.*]
I scarce did know you, uncle. There lies your niece,
Whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly stopped.
I know this act shows horrible and grim.
GRATIANO. Poor Desdemon! I am glad thy father's dead.
Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief
Shore his old thread in twain. Did he live now,
This sight would make him do a desperate turn;
Yea, curse his better angel from his side,
And fall to reprobation.
OTHELLO. 'Tis pitiful; but yet Iago knows
That she with Cassio hath the act of shame
A thousand times committed. Cassio confessed it;
And she did gratify his amorous works
With that recognizance and pledge of love
Which I first gave her. I saw it in his hand.
It was a handkerchief, an antique token
My father gave my mother.
EMILIA. O God! O heavenly God!
IAGO. Zounds, hold your peace!
EMILIA. 'Twill out, 'twill out! I peace?
No, I will speak as liberal as the north.
Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,
All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.
IAGO. Be wise, and get you home.
EMILIA. I will not.
[*Iago draws and threatens Emilia.*]
GRATIANO. Fie!
Your sword upon a woman?
EMILIA. O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou speak'st of
I found by fortune, and did give my husband;
For often with a solemn earnestness—
More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—
He begged of me to steal't.
IAGO. Villainous whore!
EMILIA. She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it,

220. liberal as the north: freely as the north wind.

And I did give't my husband.

IAGO. Filth, thou liest!

EMILIA. By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.
O murd'rous coxcomb! what should such a fool
Do with so good a wife?

OTHELLO. Are there no stones in heaven
But what serves for the thunder? Precious villain!
The Moor runs at Iago, [*but is disarmed by Montano*].
Iago kills his wife.

GRATIANO. The woman falls. Sure he hath killed his wife.

EMILIA. Ay, ay. O, lay me by my mistress' side. *Exit Iago.*

GRATIANO. He's gone, but his wife's killed.

MONTANO. 'Tis a notorious villain. Take you this weapon,
Which I have here recovered from the Moor.
Come, guard the door without. Let him not pass,
But kill him rather. I'll after that same villain,
For 'tis a damnèd slave.
Exit [*Montano, with all but Othello and Emilia*].

OTHELLO. I am not valiant neither;
But every puny whipster gets my sword.
But why should honor outlive honesty?
Let it go all.

EMILIA. What did thy song bode, lady?
Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan,
And die in music [*sings*] 'Willow, willow, willow.'
Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor:
So come my soul to bliss as I speak true.
So speaking as I think, I die, I die. *She dies.*

OTHELLO. I have another weapon in this chamber;
It is a sword of Spain, the Isebrook's temper.
O, here it is.—Uncle, I must come forth.

GRATIANO. (*within*) If thou attempt it, it will cost thee dear.
Thou hast no weapon, and perforce must suffer.

OTHELLO. Look in upon me then and speak with me,
Or, naked as I am, I will assault thee.

[*Enter Gratiano.*]

234. stones: thunderbolts. 244. whipster: top-whipping boy.
253. Isebrook's: from Q, and glossed as Innsbruck, where fine steel blades were forged. F has *ice brookes,* which may refer to the belief that the excellence of Toledo blades was due to their being tempered in snow-fed streams.

GRATIANO. What is the matter?
OTHELLO. Behold, I have a weapon;
A better never did itself sustain
Upon a soldier's thigh. I have seen the day
That with this little arm and this good sword
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop. But O vain boast!
Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.
Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed.
Here is my journey's end, here is my butt,
And very seamark of my utmost sail.
Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost fear.
Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires. Where should Othello go?
Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench!
Pale as thy smock! When we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl?
Even like thy chastity.
O cursèd, cursèd slave! Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona, Desdemona! dead!
O! O! O!

Enter Lodovico, Montano, Iago [*as prisoner,*] *and Officers; Cassio in a chair.*

LODOVICO. Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?
OTHELLO. That's he that was Othello. Here I am.
LODOVICO. Where is that viper? Bring the villain forth.
OTHELLO. I look down towards his feet—but that's a fable.
If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee. [*Wounds Iago.*]
LODOVICO. Wrench his sword from him. [*Othello is disarmed.*]
IAGO I bleed, sir, but not killed.
OTHELLO. I am not sorry neither. I'ld have thee live;
For in my sense, 'its happiness to die.
LODOVICO. O thou Othello that wert once so good,

267. butt: terminal point. 273. compt: Judgment.
286. fable: that the devil had cloven hoofs.

Fall'n in the practice of a damnèd slave,
What shall be said to thee?
OTHELLO. Why, anything:
An honorable murderer, if you will;
For naught did I in hate, but all in honor.
LODOVICO. This wretch hath part confessed his villainy.
Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?
OTHELLO. Ay.
CASSIO. Dear general, I never gave you cause.
OTHELLO. I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.
Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?
IAGO. Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.
From this time forth I never will speak word.
LODOVICO. What, not to pray?
GRATIANO. Torments will ope your lips.
OTHELLO. Well, thou dost best.
LODOVICO. Sir, you shall understand what hath befall'n,
Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter
Found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo;
And here another. The one of them imports
The death of Cassio to be undertook
By Roderigo.
OTHELLO. O villain!
CASSIO. Most heathenish and most gross!
LODOVICO. Now here's another discontented paper
Found in his pocket too; and this, it seems,
Roderigo meant t' have sent this damnèd villain;
But that, belike, Iago in the nick
Came in and satisfied him.
OTHELLO. O thou pernicious caitiff!—
How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief
That was my wife's?
CASSIO. I found it in my chamber;
And he himself confessed but even now
That there he dropped it for a special purpose
Which wrought to his desire.
OTHELLO. O fool! fool! fool!
CASSIO. There is besides in Roderigo's letter,
How he upbraids Iago that he made him

Brave me upon the watch; whereon it came
That I was cast; and even but now he spake,
After long seeming dead—Iago hurt him,
Iago set him on.

LODOVICO. You must forsake this room and go with us.
Your power and your command is taken off,
And Cassio rules in Cyprus. For this slave,
If there be any cunning cruelty
That can torment him much and hold him long,
It shall be his. You shall close prisoner rest
Till that the nature of your fault be known
To the Venetian state. Come, bring away.

OTHELLO. Soft you! a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unusèd to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their med'cinable gum. Set you down this.
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
And smote him—thus. *He stabs himself.*

LODOVICO. O bloody period!

GRATIANO. All that's spoke is marred.

OTHELLO. I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.
He [falls upon the bed and] dies.

CASSIO. This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon;
For he was great of heart.

347. Indian: from Q; F has "Judean," sometimes glossed as Judas.

LODOVICO. [*to Iago*] O Spartan dog,
More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea!
Look on the tragic loading of this bed.
This is thy work. The object poisons sight;
Let it be hid. Gratiano, keep the house,
And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
For they succeed on you. To you, lord governor,
Remains the censure of this hellish villain,
The time, the place, the torture. O, enforce it!
Myself will straight abroad, and to the state
This heavy act with heavy heart relate. *Exeunt.*

361. Spartan dog: a kind of bloodhound, relentless and mute.
368. censure: sentencing.

Othello and the Critics

Othello: A Bloody Farce

THOMAS RYMER

THE FABLE

Othello, a Blackmoor Captain, by talking of his Prowess and Feats of War, makes Desdemona a Senators Daughter to be in love with him; and to be married to him, without her Parents knowledge; And having preferred Cassio, to be his Lieutenant, (a place which his Ensign Jago sued for) Jago in revenge, works the Moor into a Jealousy that Cassio Cuckolds him: which he effects by stealing and conveying a certain Handkerchief, which had, at the Wedding, been by the Moor presented to his Bride. Hereupon, Othello and Jago plot the Deaths of Desdemona and Cassio, Othello Murders her, and soon after is convinced of her Innocence. And as he is about to be carried to Prison, in order to be punish'd for the Murder, He kills himself.

What ever rubs or difficulty may stick on the Bark, the Moral, sure, of this Fable is very instructive.

1. First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors.

. . . . . .

Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen.

Thirdly, This may be a lesson to Husbands, that before their Jealousie be Tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical.

Cinthio affirms that She was not overcome by a Womanish [132] * Appetite, but by the Vertue of the Moor. It must be a good-natur'd

From *A Short View of Tragedy,* London, 1693. The standard modern edition is in *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer,* ed. Curt Zimansky (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), pp. 132–164. Bracketed page numbers are to this edition.

* [See Editor's comment in Preface regarding bracketed figures.]

Reader that takes Cinthio's word in this case, tho' in a Novel. Shakespear, who is accountable both to the Eyes, and to the Ears, And to convince the very heart of an Audience, shews that Desdemona was won, by hearing Othello talk,

OTHELLO. ———*I spoke of most disastrous chances,*
of Moving accidents, by flood and field;
of hair-breadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach;
of being taken by the insolent foe;
and sold to slavery: of my redemption thence;
and portents in my Travels History:
wherein of Antars vast, and Desarts idle,
rough Quarries, Rocks, and Hills, whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak, such was my process:
and of the Cannibals that each others eat:
the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
do grow beneath their shoulders——— (I. iii. 134–45)

This was the Charm, this was the philtre, the love-powder that took the Daughter of this Noble Venetian. This was sufficient to make the Black-amoor White, and reconcile all, tho' there had been a Cloven-foot into the bargain. [133]

. . . . .

Shakespear in this Play calls 'em the supersubtle venetians. Yet examine throughout the Tragedy there is nothing in the noble Desdemona, that is not below any Countrey Chamber-maid with us.

And the account he gives of their Nobelmen and Senate, can only be calculated for the latitude of Gotham.

The Character of that State is to employ strangers in their Wars; But shall a Poet thence fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General; or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk? With us a Black-amoor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but Shakespear would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General. With us a Moor might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench: Shake-spear, would provide him the Daughter and Heir of some great Lord, or Privy-Councellor: And all the Town should reckon it a very suitable match: Yet the English are not bred up with that hatred and aversion to the Moors, as are the Venetians, who suffer by a perpetual Hostility from them,

Littora littoribus contraris———

Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; And, certainly, never was any Play fraught, like this of *Othello,* with improbabilities.

The Characters or Manners, which are the second part in a Tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper, than the Fable was improbably and absurd.

Othello is made a Venetian General. We see nothing done by him, nor related concerning him, that comports with the condition of a General, or, indeed, of a Man, unless the killing himself, to avoid a death the Law was about to inflict upon him. When his Jealousy had wrought him up to a resolution of's taking revenge for the suppos'd injury, He sets Jago to the fighting part, to kill Cassio; And chuses himself to murder the silly Woman his Wife, that was like to make no resistance.

His Love and his Jealousie are no part of a Souldiers Character, unless for Comedy.

But what is most intolerable is Jago. He is no Black-amoor Souldier, so we may be sure he should be like other Souldiers of our acquaintance; yet never in Tragedy, nor in Comedy, nor in Nature was a Souldier with his Character; take it in the Authors own words; [134]

> EM. ———*some Eternal Villain,*
> *Some busie, and insinuating Rogue,*
> *Some cogging, couzening Slave, to get some Office.*
> (IV. ii. 131–3)

Horace Describes a Souldier otherwise:

> *Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.**

Shakespear knew his Character of Jago was inconsistent. In this very Play he pronounces,

> *If thou dost deliver more or less than Truth,*
> *Thou are no Souldier.———* (II. iii. 211–12)

This he knew, but to entertain the Audience with something new and surprising, against common sense, and Nature, he would pass upon us a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal, instead of an

* ["Active, irascible, unyielding, fierce." From Horace's *Art of Poetry* (121). Horace (65–8 B.C.) is here urging consistency and probability in characterization, and by illustration remarks that an Achilles should have these military qualities.]

open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing Souldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the World.

. . . . .

Nor is our Poet more discreet in his Desdemona, He had chosen a Souldier for his Knave: And a Venetian Lady is to be the Fool.

This Senators Daughter runs away to (a Carriers Inn) the Sagittary, with a Black-amoor: is no sooner wedded to him, but the very night she Beds him, is importuning and teizing him for a young smock-fac'd Lieutenant, Cassio. And tho' she perceives the Moor Jealous of Cassio, yet will she not forbear, but still rings Cassio, Cassio in both his Ears.

Roderigo is the Cully of Jago, brought in to be murder'd by Jago, [135] that Jago's hands might be the more in Blood, and be yet the more abominable Villain: who without that was too wicked on all Conscience; And had more to answer for, than any Tragedy, or Furies could inflict upon him. So there can be nothing in the characters, either for the profit, or to delight an Audience.

The third thing to be consider'd is the Thoughts. But from such Characters, we need not expect many that are either true, or fine, or noble.

And without these, that is, without sense or meaning, the fourth part of Tragedy, which is the expression can hardly deserve to be treated on distinctly. The verse rumbling in our Ears are of good use to help off the action.

In the Neighing of an Horse, or in the growling of a Mastiff, there is a meaning, there is an lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity, than many times in the Tragical flights of Shakespear.

Step then amongst the Scenes to observe the Conduct in this Tragedy.

The first we see are Jago and Roderigo, by Night in the Streets of Venice. After growling a long time together, they resolve to tell Brabantio that his Daughter is run away with the Black-a-moor. Jago and Roderigo were not of quality to be familiar with Brabantio, nor had any provocation from him, to deserve a rude thing at their hands. Brabantio was a Noble Venetian one of the Sovereign Lords, and principal persons in the Government, Peer to the most Serene Doge, one attended with more state, ceremony and punctillio, than any English Duke, or Nobelman in the Government will pretend to. This misfortune in his Daughter is so prodigious, so tender a point, as

might puzzle the finest Wit of the most supersubtle Venetian to touch upon it, or break the discovery to her Father. See then how delicately Shakespear minces the matter:

> RODERIGO. *What ho, Brabantio, Signior Brabantio, ho.*
> IAGO. *Awake, what ho, Brabantio,*
> *Thieves, thieves, thieves:*
> *Look to your House, your Daughter, and your Bags*
> *Thieves, thieves.*
> BRABANTIO at a Window.
> BRA. *What is the reason of this terrible summons?* [136]
> *What is the matter there?*
> ROD. *Signior, is all your Family within?*
> IAGO. *Are your Doors lockt?*
> BRA. *Why, wherefore ask you this?*
> IAGO. *Sir, you are robb'd, for shame put on your Gown,*
> *Your Heart is burst, you have lost half your Soul,*
> *Even now, very now, an old black Ram*
> *Is tupping your white Ewe: arise, arise,*
> *Awake the snorting Citizens with the Bell,*
> *Or else the Devil will make a Grandsire of you, arise I say.*
> (I. i. 79–93) [137]

. . . . .

But besides the Manners to a Magnifico, humanity cannot bear that an old Gentleman in his misfortune should be insulted over with such a rabble of Skoundrel language, when no cause or provocation. Yet thus it is on our Stage, this is our School of good manners, and the Speculum Vitae.

But our Magnifico is here in the dark, nor are yet his Robes on: attend him to the Senate house, and there see the difference, see the effects of Purple.

So, by and by, we find the Duke of Venice with his Senators in Councel, at Midnight, upon advice that the Turks, or Ottamites, or both together, were ready in transport Ships, put to Sea, in order to make a Descent upon Cyprus. This is the posture, when we see Brabantio, and Othello join them. By their Conduct and manner of talk, a body must strain hard to fancy the Scene at Venice; And not rather in some of our Cinq-ports, where the Baily and his Fisher-men are knocking their heads together on account of some Whale; or some terrible broil upon the Coast. But to shew them true Venetians, the Maritime affairs stick not long on their hand; the publick may

sink or swim. They will sit up all night to hear a Doctors Commons, Matrimonial, Cause. And have the Merits of the Cause at large laid open to 'em, that they may decide it before they Stir. What can be pleaded to keep awake their attention so wonderfully?

Never, sure, was form of pleading so tedious and so heavy, as this [138] whole Scene, and midnight entertainment. Take his own words: says the Respondent.

> OTH. *Most potent, grave, and reverend Signiors,*
> *My very noble, and approv'd good Masters:*
> *That I have tane away this old mans Daughter;*
> *It is most true: true, I have Married her,*
> *The very front and head of my offending,*
> *Hath this extent, no more: rude I am in my speech.*
> *And little blest with the set phrase of peace,*
> *For since these Arms of mine had seven years pith,*
> *Till now some nine Moons wasted, they have us'd*
> *Their dearest action in the Tented Field:*
> *And little of this great World can I speak,*
> *More than pertains to Broils and Battail,*
> *And therefore little shall I grace my Cause,*
> *In speaking of my self; yet by your gracious patience*
> *I would a round unravish'd Tale deliver,*
> *Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what charms*
> *What Conjuration, and what might Magick,*
> *(for such proceedings am I charg'd withal)*
> *I won his Daughter.* (I. iii. 76–94)

. . . . .

One might rather think the novelty, and strangeness of the case prevail'd upon them: no, the Senators do not reckon it strange at all. Instead of starting at the Prodigy, every one is familiar with Desdemona, as he were her own natural Father, rejoice in her good fortune, and wish their own several Daughters as hopefully married. Should the Poet have provided such a Husband for an only Daughter of any noble Peer in England, the Black-amoor must have chang'd his Skin, to look our House of Lords in the Face. [139]

. . . . .

For the Second Act, our Poet having dispatcht his affairs at Venice, shews the Action next (I know not how many leagues off) in the Island of Cyprus. The Audience must be there too: And yet our

Bays had it never in his head, to make any provision of Transport Ships for them. [142]

. . . . .

But pass we to something of a more serious air and Complexion. *Othello* and his Bride are the first Night, no sooner warm in Bed together, but a Drunken Quarrel happening in the Garison, two Souldiers Fight; And the General rises to part the Fray: He swears.

OTHEL. *Now by Heaven,*
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion, having my best judgment cool'd,
Assays to lead the way: if once I stir,
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
Shall sink in my rebuke: give me to know
How this foul rout began; who set it on,
And he that is approv'd in this offence,
Tho' he had twin'd with me both at birth,
Should lose me: what, in a Town of War,
Yet wild, the peoples Hearts brimful of fear,
To manage private, and domestick quarrels,
In Night, and on the Court, and guard of safety,
'Tis Monstrous, Jago, who began? (II. iii. 196–209)

In the days of yore, Souldiers did not swear in this fashion. What should a Souldier say farther, when he swears, unless he blaspheme? action shou'd speak the rest. What follows must be *ex ore gladii;* He is to rap out an Oath, not Wire-draw and Spin it out: by the style one might judge that Shakespears Souldiers were never bred in a [145] Camp, but rather had belong'd to some Affidavit-Office. Consider also throughout this whole Scene, how the Moorish General proceeds in examining into this Rout; No Justice Clod-pate could go on with more Phlegm and deliberation. The very first night that he lyes with the Divine Desdemona to be thus interrupted, might provoke a Mans Christian Patience to swear in another style. But a Negro General is a Man of strange Mettle. Only his Venetian Bride is a match for him. She understands that the Souldiers in the Garison are by th' ears together: And presently she at midnight, is in amongst them.

DESD. *What's the matter there?*
OTHEL. *All's well now Sweeting———*
Come away to Bed——— (II. ii. 243–5)

In the beginning of this second Act, before they had lain together. Desdemona was said to be, our Captains Captain; Now they are no sooner in Bed together, but Jago is advising Cassio in these words.

JAGO.———Our Generals Wife is now the General, I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted, and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and devotement of her parts and graces. Confess your self freely to her, importune her; she'll help to put you in your place again: she is so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, that she holds it a vice in her goodness, not to do more than she is requested. This broken joint between you and her Husband, intreat her to splinter——— (II. iii. 304–13)

And he says afterwards.

JAGO.———*'Tis most easie*
The inclining Desdemona to subdue,
In any honest suit. She's fram'd as fruitful,
As the free Elements: And then for her
To win the Moor, were't to renounce his Baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list: [146]
Even as her appetite shall play the God
*With his weak function——— (II. iii. 328–37)

This kind of discourse implies an experience and long conversation, the Honey-Moon over, and a Marriage of some standing. Would any man, in his wits, talk thus of a Bridegroom and Bride the first night of their coming together?

Yet this is necessary for our Poet; it would not otherwise serve his turn. This is the source, the foundation of his Plot; hence is the spring and occasion for all the Jealousie and bluster that ensues.

Nor are we in better circumstances for Roderigo. The last thing said by him in the former Act was,

ROD.———*I'll go sell all my Land.* (I. iii. 376)

A fair Estate is sold to put money in his Purse, for this adventure. And lo here, the next day.

ROD. I do follow here in the Chace, not like a Hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry: My Money is almost spent. I have been tonight exceedingly well cudgell'd, I think the issue will be, I shall have so much experience for my pains, and so no Money at all, and with a little more wit return to Venice. (II. iii. 352–7)

The Venetian squire had a good riddance for his Acres. The Poet allows him just time to be once drunk, a very conscionable reckoning! [147]

. . . . .

Cassio having escaped the Storm comes on shoar at Cyprus, that night gets Drunk, Fights, is turn'd out from his Command, grows sober again, takes advice how to be restor'd, is all Repentance and Mortification: yet before he sleeps, is in the Morning at his Generals door with a noise of Fiddles, and a Droll to introduce him to a little Mouth-speech with the Bride.

> CASSIO. *Give me advantage of some brief discourse*
> *With Desdemona alone.*
> EM. *Pray you come in,*
> *I will bestow you, where you shall have time*
> *To speak your bosom freely.* (III. i. 52–5)

So, they are put together: And when he had gone on a good while speaking his bosom, Desdemona answers him.

> DES. *Do not doubt that, before Emilia here,*
> *I give thee warrant of thy place; assure thee,*
> *If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it,*
> *To the last article———* (III. iii. 19–22)

Then after a ribble rabble of fulsome impertinence. She is at her Husband slap dash:

> DESD.———*Good love, call him back.*
> OTHEL. *Not now, sweet Desdemona, some other time.*
> DESD. *But shall't shortly?*
> OTHEL. *The sooner, sweet, for you.*
> DESD. *Shall't be to-night at Supper?*
> OTHEL. *No, not tonight.*
> DESD. *To-morrow Dinner then?*
> OTHEL. *I shall not dine at home,*
> *I meet the Captains at the Citadel.*
> DESD. *Why then to morrow night, or Tuesday morn,*
> *Or night, or Wednesday morn?* (III. iii. 55–62)

After forty lines more, at this rate, they part, and then comes the wonderful Scene, where Jago by shrugs, half words, and ambiguous reflections, works Othello up to be Jealous. One might think, after

[148] what we have seen, that there needs no great cunning, no great poetry and address to make the Moor Jealous. Such impatience, such a rout for a handsome young fellow, the very morning after her Marriage must make him either to be jealous, or to take her for a Changeling, below his Jealousie. After this Scene, it might strain the Poets skill to reconcile the couple, and allay the Jealousie. Jago now can only *actum agere,* and vex the audience with a nauseous repetition.

Whence comes it then. that this is the top scene, the Scene that raises Othello above all other Tragedies on our Theatres? It is purely from the Action; from the Mops and the Mows, the Grimace, the Grins and Gesticulation. Such scenes as this have made all the World run after Harlequin and Scaramuccio.

. . . . .

Othello the night of his arrival at Cyprus, is to consummate with Desdemona, they go to Bed. Both are rais'd and run into the Town amidst the Souldiers that were a fighting: then go to Bed again, that morning he sees Cassio with her; She importunes him to restore Cassio. Othello shews nothing of the Souldiers Mettle: but like a tedious, drawling, tame Goose, is gaping after any paultrey insinuation, labouring to be jealous; And catching at every blown surmize. [149]

JAGO. *My Lord, I see you are moved.*
OTH. *No, not much moved.*
Do not think but Desdemona is honest.
JAG. *Long live she so, and long live you to think so.*
OTH. *And yet how Nature erring from it self,*
JAGO. *I, There's the point: as to be bold with you,*
Not to affect many proposed Matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Wherein we see, in all things, Nature tends,
Fye, we may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural———

(III. iii. 228–37)

The Poet here is certainly in the right and by consequence the foundation of the Play must be concluded to be Monstrous; And the constitution, all over, to be most rank,

Foul disporportion, thoughts unnatural.

Which instead of moving pity, or any passion Tragical and Reasonable, can produce nothing but horror and aversion, and what is odius and grievous to an Audience. After this fair Mornings work, the Bride enters, drops a Cursey.

DESD. *How now, my dear Othello,*
Your Dinner, and the generous Islanders
By you invited, do attend your presence.
OTH. *I am to blame.*
DESD. *Why is your speech so faint? Are you not well.*
OTH. *I have a pain upon my Fore-head, dear.* (III. iii. 283–8)

Michael Cassio came not from Venice in the Ship with Desdemona, nor till this Morning could be suspected of an opportunity with her. And 'tis now but Dinner time; yet the Moor complains of his Forehead. He might have set a Guard on Cassio, or have lockt up Desdemona, or have observ'd their carriage a day or two longer. He is on other occasions phlegmatick enough: this is very hasty. But after Dinner we have a wonderful flight: [150]

OTHEL. *What sense had I of her stoln hours of lust?*
I saw't not, thought it not, it harm'd not me:
I slept the next night well, was free and merry,
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips———
(III. iii. 342–5)

A little after this, says he,

OTH. *Give me a living reason that she's disloyal.*
JAGO.———*I lay with Cassio lately,*
And being troubled with a raging Tooth, I could not sleep;
There are a kind of men so loose of Soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs,
One of this kind is Cassio:
In sleep I heard him say: sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves:
And then, Sir, wou'd he gripe, and wring my hand,
Cry out, sweet Creature; and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluckt up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my Lips, then laid his Leg
Over my Thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cry'd, cursed fate, that gave thee to the Moor.
(III. iii. 413–30)

By the Rapture of Othello, one might think that he raves, is not of sound Memory, forgets that he has not yet been two nights in the Matrimonial Bed with his Desdemona. But we find Jago, who should have a better memory, forging his lies after the very same Model. The very night of their Marriage at Venice, the Moor, and also Cassio, were sent away to Cyprus. In the Second Act, Othello and his Bride go the first time to Bed; The Third Act opens the next morning. The parties have been in view to this moment. We saw the opportunity which was given for Cassio to speak his bosom to her; once, indeed, might go a great way with a Venetian. But once, will not do the Poets business; The Audience must suppose a great many bouts, to make the plot operate. They must deny their senses, to reconcile it to common sense: or make it any way consistent, and hang together. [151]

. . . . .

Jago had some pretence to be discontent with Othello and Cassio: And what passed hitherto, was the operation of revenge. Desdemona had never done him harm, always kind to him, and to his Wife; was his Country-woman, a Dame of quality: for him to abet her Murder, shews nothing of a Souldier, nothing of a Man, nothing of Nature in it. The Ordinary of New gate never had the like [155] Monster to pass under his examination. Can it be any diversion to see a Rogue beyond what the Devil ever finish'd? Or wou'd it be any instruction to an Audience? Jago cou'd desire no better than to set Cassio and Othello, his two Enemies, by the Ears together; so he might have been reveng'd on them both at once: And chusing for his own share, the Murder of Desdemona, he had the opportunity to play booty, and save the poor harmless wretch. But the Poet must do every thing by contraries: to surprize the Audience still with something horrible and prodigious, beyond any human imagination. At this rate he must out-do the Devil, to be a Poet in the rank with Shakespear.

Soon after this, arrives from Venice, Ludovico, a noble Cousin of Desdemona, presently she is at him also, on the behalf of Cassio.

DESD. *Cousin there's fallen between him and my Lord*
An unkind breach, but you shall make all well.
LUD. *Is there division 'twixt my Lord and Cassio.*
DESD. *A most unhappy one, I wou'd do much*
To attone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.
(IV. i. 219–20, 225–7)

By this time, we are to believe the couple have been a week or two Married: And Othello's Jealousie that had rag'd so loudly, and had been so uneasie to himself, must have reach'd her knowledge. The Audience have all herd him more plain with her, than was needful to a Venetian capacity: And yet she must still be impertinent in her suit for Cassio, well, this Magnifico comes from the Doge, and Senators, to displace Othello.

LUD.———*Deputing Cassio in his Government.*
DESD. *Trust me, I am glad on't.*
OTH. *Indeed.*
DESD. *My Lord.*
OTH. *I am glad to see you mad.*
DESD. *How, sweet Othello.*
OTH. *Devil.*
DESD. *I have not deserved this.*
OTH. *O Devil, Devil———*
Out of my sight. [156]
DESD. *I will not stay to offend you.*
LUD. *Truly, an obedient Lady.*
I do beseech your Lordship call her back.
OTH. *Mistress.*
DESD. *My Lord.*
OTH. *What would you with her Sir?*
LUD. *Who, I, my Lord?*
OTH. *I, you did wish that I wou'd make her turn.*
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn agen, and she can weep, Sir, weep.
And she is obedient, as you say, obedient:
Very obedient———
LUD. *What strike your Wife?*
(IV. i. 233–7, 240, 243–53, 269)

Of what flesh and blood does our Poet make these noble Venetians? the men without Gall; the Women without either Brains or Sense? A Senators Daughter runs away with this Black-amoor; the Government employs this Moor to defend them against the Turks, so resent not the Moors Marriage at present, but the danger over, her Father gets the Moor Cashier'd, sends his Kinsman, Seignior Ludovico, to Cyprus with the Commission for a new General; who, at his arrival, finds the Moor calling the Lady his Kinswoman, Whore and Strumpet, and kicking her: what says the Magnifico?

LUD. *My Lord this would not be believ'd in Venice,*
Tho' I shou'd swear I saw't, 'tis very much;
Make her amends: she weeps. (IV. i. 238–40)

The Moor has no body to take his part, no body of his Colour: Ludovico has the new Governour Cassio, and all his Countrymen Venetians about him. What Poet wou'd give a villanous Black-amoor this Ascendant? What Tramontain could fancy the Venetians so low, so despicable, or so patient? This outrage to an injur'd Lady, the Divine Desdemona, might in a colder Climate have provoked some body to be her Champion: but the Italians may well conclude we have a strange Genius for Poetry. In the next Scene Othello is examining the supposed Bawd: then follows another storm of horrour and outrage against the poor Chicken, his Wife. [157] Some Drayman or drunken Tinker might possibly treat his drab at this sort of rate, and mean no harm by it: but for his excellency, a My lord General, to Serenade a Senator's Daughter with such a volly of scoundrel filthy Language, is sure the most absurd Maggot that ever bred from any Poets addle Brain.

. . . . .

Yet to make all worse, her Murder, and the manner of it, had before been resolv'd upon and concerted. But nothing is to provoke a Venetian; she takes all in good part; had the Scene lain in Russia, what cou'd we have expected more? With us a Tinkers Trull wou'd be Nettled, wou'd repartee with more spirit, and not appear so void of spleen.

DESD. *O good Jago,*
What shall I do to win my Lord agen?
(IV. ii. 149–50)

No Woman bred out of a Pig-stye, cou'd talk so meanly. After this, she is call'd to Supper with Othello, Ludovico, &c. after that comes a filthy sort of Pastoral Scene, where the Wedding Sheets, and Song of Willow, and her Mothers Maid, poor Barbara, are not the least moving things in this entertainment.

. . . . .

The last Act begins with Jago and Roderigo; Who a little before had been upon the huff: [158]

ROD. I say it is not very well: I will make my self known to Desdemona; if she will return me my Jewels, I will give over my suit, and repent my unlawful sollicitation, if not, assure your self, I'll seek satisfaction of you. (IV. ii. 197–200)

Roderigo, a Noble Venetian had sought Desdemona in Marriage, is troubled to find the Moor had got her from him, advises with Jago, who wheadles him to sell his Estate, and go over the Sea to Cyprus, in expectation to Cuckold Othello, there having cheated Roderigo of all his Money and Jewels, on pretence to presenting them to Desdemona, our Gallant grows angry, and would have satisfaction from Jago; who sets all right, by telling him Cassio is to be Governour, Othello is going with Desdemona into Mauritania: to prevent this, you are to murder Cassio, and then all may be well.

. . . . .

Had Roderigo been one of the Banditi, he might not much stick at the Murder. But why Roderigo should take this for payment, and risque his person where the prospect of advantage is so very uncertain and remote, no body can imagine. It had need be a supersubtle Venetian that this Plot will pass upon. Then after a little spurt of villany and Murder, we are brought to the most lamentable, that ever appear'd on any Stage. A noble Venetian Lady is to be murdered by our Poet: in sober sadness, purely for being a Fool. No Pagan Poet but wou'd have found some Machine for her deliverance. Pegasus wou'd have strain'd hard to have brought old Perseus on his back, time enough, to rescue this Andromeda from so foul a Monster. Has our Christian Poetry no generosity, nor bowels? Ha, Sir Lancelot! ha St. George! Will no Ghost leave the shades for us in extremity, to save a distressed Damosel?

But for our comfort, however felonious is the Heart, hear with what soft language, he does approach her, with a Candle in his Hand: [159]

OTH. *Put out the light and then put out the light;*
If I quench thee, thou flaming Minister,
I can again thy former light restore——— (V. ii. 7–9)

Who would call him a Barbarian, Monster, Savage? Is this a Blackamoor?

Soles occider & redire possunt———

The very Soul and Quintessence of Sir George Etheridge.

One might think the General should not glory much in this action, but make an hasty work on't, and have turn'd his Eyes away from so unsouldierly an Execution: yet is he all pause and deliberation: handles her as calmly: and is as careful of her Souls health, as it had been her Father Confessor. Have you prayed to night, Desdemona? But the suspence is necessary, that he might have a convenient while so to roul his Eyes, and so to gnaw his nether lip to the spectators. Besides the greater cruelty—*sub tam lentis maxillis.**

But hark, a most tragical thing laid to her charge.

OTH. *That Handkerchief, that I so lov'd, and gave thee,*
Thou gav'st to Cassio.
DESD. *No by my Life and Soul:*
Send for the man and ask him.
OTH.———*By Heaven, I saw my Hankerchief in his hand*———
———*I saw the Handkerchief.* (V. ii. 51–3, 65, 69)

So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief? Why was not this call'd the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief?* What can be more absurd than (as Quintilian expresses it) *in parvis litibus has Tragœ dias movere?* We have heard of Fortunatus his Purse, and of the Invisible Cloak, long ago worn thread bare, and stow'd up in the Wardrobe of obsolete Romances: one might think, that were a fitter place for this Handkerchief, than that it, at this time of day, be worn on the Stage, to raise every where all this clutter and turmoil. Had it been Desdemona's Garter, the Sagacious Moor might have smelt a Rat: but the Handkerchief is so remote a trifle, no Booby, on this side Mauritania, cou'd make any consequence from it. [160]

We may learn here, that a Woman never loses her Tongue, even tho' after she is stifl'd.

DESD. *O falsly, falsly murder'd.*
EM. *Sweet Desdemona, O sweet Mistress, speak.*
DESD. *A guiltless death I dye.*
EM. *O who has done the deed?*
DESD. *No body, I my self, farewel.*
Commend me to my kind Lord, O farewel.
(V. ii. 120, 124–8)

. . . . .

* [Suetonius, *Tiberius* XXI, 2: Augustus remarks that Rome is doomed to be devoured slowly by Tiberius.]

But hark what follows:

> OTH. ———*O heavy hour!*
> *Methinks it shou'd be now a huge Eclipse*
> *Of Sun and Moon, and that the affrighted globe*
> *Shou'd yawn at Alteration.* (V. ii. 101–4)

This is wonderful. Here is Poetry to elevate and amuse. Here is sound All-sufficient. It wou'd be uncivil to ask Flamstead [first royal astronomer], if the Sun and Moon can both together be so hugely eclipsed, in any heavy hour whatsoever. Nor must the Spectators consult Gresham Colledge, whether a body is naturally frighted till he Yawn agen. The Fortune of Greece is not concern'd with these Matters. These are Physical circumstances a Poet may be ignorant in, without any harm to the publick. These slips have no influence on our Manners and good Life; which are the Poets Province.

Rather may we ask here what unnatural crime Desdemona, or her Parents had committed, to bring this Judgment down upon her; to Wed a Black-amoor, and innocent to be thus cruelly murder'd by him. What instruction can we make out of this Catastrophe? Or whither must our reflection lead us? Is not this to envenome and sour our spirits, to make us repine and grumble at Providence; and the government of the World? If this be our end, what boots it to be Vertuous? [161]

Desdemona dropt the Handkerchief, and missed it that very day after her Marriage; it might have been rumpl'd up with her Wedding sheets: And this Night that she lay in her wedding sheets, the Fairey Napkin (whilst Othello was stifling her) might have started up to disarm his fury, and stop his ungracious mouth. Then might she (in a Traunce for fear) have lain as dead. Then might he, believing her dead, touch'd with remorse, have honestly cut his own Throat, by the good leave, and with the applause of all the Spectators. Who might thereupon have gone home with a quiet mind, admiring the beauty of Providence; fairly and truly represented on the Theatre.

. . . . .

But from this Scene to the end of the Play we meet with nothing but blood and butchery, described much-what to the style of the last Speeches and Confessions of the persons executed at Tyburn: with this difference, that there we have the fact, and the due course of Justice, whereas our Poet against all Justice and Reason, against all

Law, Humanity and Nature, in a barbarous arbitrary way, executes and makes havock of his subjects, Hab-nab, as they come to [162] hand. Desdemona dropt her Handkerchief; therefore she must be stifl'd. Othello, by law to be broken on the Wheel, by the Poets cunning escapes with cutting his own Throat. Cassio, for I know not what, comes off with a broken shin. Jago murders his Benefactor Roderigo, as this were poetical gratitude. Jago is not yet kill'd, because there never yet was such a villain alive. The Devil, if once he brings a man to be dipt in a deadly sin, lets him alone, to take his course: and now when the Foul Fiend has done with him, our wise Authors take the sinner into their poetical service; there to accomplish him, and do the Devils drudgery.

Philosophy tells us it is a principle in the Nature of Man to be grateful.

History may tell us that John an Oaks, John a Stiles, or Jago were ungrateful; Poetry is to follow Nature; Philosophy must be his guide: history and fact in particular cases of John an Oaks, or John of Styles, are no warrant or direction for a Poet. Therefore Aristotle is always telling us that Poetry is . . . more general and abstracted, is led more by the Philosophy, the reason and nature of things, than History: which only records things higlety, piglety, right or wrong as they happen. History might without any preamble or difficulty, say that Jago was ungrateful. Philosophy then calls him unnatural; But the Poet is not, without huge labour and preparation to expose the Monster; and after shew the Divine Vengeance executed upon him. The Poet is not to add wilful Murder to his ingratitude: he has not antidote enough for the Poison: his Hell and Furies are not punishment sufficient for one single crime, of that bulk and aggravation.

EM. *O thou dull Moor, that Handkerchief thou speakest on,*
I found by Fortune, and did give my Husband:
For often with a solemn earnestness,
(More than indeed belong'd to such a trifle)
He beg'd of me to steal it. (V. ii. 228–32)

Here we see the meanest woman in the Play takes this Handkerchief for a trifle below her Husband to trouble his head about it. Yet we find, it entered into our Poets head, to make a Tragedy of this Trifle.

Then for the unraveling of the Plot, as they call it, never was [163] old deputy Recorder in a Country Town, with his spectacles in

summoning up the evidence, at such a puzzle: so blunder'd, and bedoultefied: as is our Poet, to have a good riddance: And get the Catastrophe off his hands.

What can remain with the Audience to carry home with them from this sort of Poetry, for their use and edification? how can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, Tintamarre, and Jingle-jangle, beyond what all the Parish Clarks of London, with their old Testament farces, and interludes, in Richard the seconds time cou'd ever pretend to? Our only hopes, for the good of their Souls, can be, that these people go to the Playhouse, as they do to Church, to sit still, look on one another, make no reflection, nor mind the Play, more than they would a Sermon.

There is in this Play, some burlesk, some humour, and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew, and some Mimickry to divert the spectators: but the tragical part is, plainly none other, than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour. [164]

The Motiveless Villain

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

[i.] The admirable preparation, so characteristic of Shakespeare, in the introduction of Roderigo as the dupe on whom Iago first exercises his art, and in so doing displays his own character. Roderigo [is] already fitted and predisposed [to be a dupe] by his own passions —without any fixed principle or strength of character (the want of character and [44] the power of the passions,—like the wind loudest in empty houses, form his character)—but yet not without the moral notions and sympathies with honor which his rank, connections had hung upon him. The very three first lines happily state the nature and foundation of the friendship—the purse—as well [as] the contrast of Roderigo's intemperance of mind with Iago's coolness, the coolness of a preconceiving experimenter. The mere language of protestation in

> *If ever* [*I did dream of such a matter,*]
> *Abhor me—*

which, fixing the associative link that determines Roderigo's continuation of complaint—

> [*Thou told'st me thou didst hold him*] *in thy hate—*

elicits a true feeling of Iago's—the dread of contempt habit[ual] to those who encourage in themselves and have their keenest pleasure in the feeling and expression of contempt for others. His high self-opinion—and how a wicked man employes his real feelings as well as assumes those most alien from his own, as instruments of his purpose. [45]

. . . . .

Based on *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (Harvard University Press, 1930), I, 44, 45, 49, 125. See below, p. 256, and Raysor's notes for an account of how Coleridge's observations were pieced together from reports of his lectures.

[I. iii. 319–20.

IAGO. *Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.*]

Iago's passionless character, all will in intellect; therefore a bold partisan here of a truth, but yet of a truth converted into falsehood by absence of all the modifications by the frail nature of man. And the last sentiment—

[. . . *our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect or scion*]—

There lies the Iagoism of how many! And the repetition, "Go make money!"—a pride in it, of an anticipated dupe, stronger than the love of lucre.

[I. iii. 377–78. First Quarto and Stockdale text:

IAGO. *Go to, farewell, put money enough in your purse: Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.*]

The triumph! Again, "put money," after the effect has been fully produced. The last speech, [Iago's soliloquy,] the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity—how awful! In itself fiendish; while yet he was allowed to bear the divine image, too fiendish for his own steady view. A being next to devil, only not quite devil—and this Shakespeare has attempted—executed—without disgust, without scandal! [49]

. . . . .

And [in Iago's soliloquy, II. i. 280–306, note] the dreadful habit of thinking of moral feelings and qualities only as prudential ends to means.

Othello's belief not jealousy; forced upon him by Iago, and such as any man would and must feel who had believed of Iago as Othello. His great mistake that we know Iago for a villain from the first moment. [III. iii. 154–80.]

Proofs of the contrary [to a jealous] character in Othello.

[But in considering the essence of the Shakespearian Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances. Then we shall immediately feel the fundamental difference between the solemn agony of the noble Moor, and the wretched fishing jealousies of Leontes, and the morbid suspiciousness of Leonatus, who is, in other respects, a fine character. Othello had no life

but in Desdemona:—the belief that she, his angel, had fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, wrought a civil war in his heart. She is his counterpart; and, like him, is almost sanctified in our eyes by her absolute unsuspiciousness, and holy entireness of love. As the curtain drops, which do we pity the most?] [125]

Othello as Tragedy and the Character of Iago

WILLIAM HAZLITT

It has been said that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. That is, it substitutes imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness. It gives us a high and permanent interest, beyond ourselves, in humanity as such. It raises the great, the remote, and the possible to an equality with the real, the little and the near. It makes man a partaker with his kind. It subdues and softens the stubbornness of his will. It teaches him that there are and have been others like himself, by showing him as in a glass what they have felt, thought, and done. It opens the chambers of the human heart. It leaves nothing indifferent to us that can affect our common nature. It excites our sensibility by exhibiting the passions wound up to the utmost pitch by the power of imagination or the temptation of circumstances; and corrects their fatal excesses in ourselves by pointing to the greater extent of sufferings and of crimes to which they have led others. Tragedy creates a balance of the affections. It makes us thoughtful spectators in the lists of life. It is the refiner of the species; a discipline of humanity. The habitual study of poetry and works of imagination is one chief part of a well-grounded education. A taste for liberal art is necessary to complete the character of a gentleman. Science alone is hard and mechanical. It exercises the understanding upon things out of ourselves, while it leaves the affections unemployed, or engrossed with our own immediate, narrow interests.—*Othello* furnishes an illustration of these remarks. It excites our sympathy in an extraordinary degree. The moral it conveys has a closer application to the concerns

From *The Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817). Reprinted from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt,* ed. P. P. Howe after the edition of A. R. Waller and A. Glover (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1930), IV, 200–201, 206–209.

of human life than that of almost any other of Shakespear's plays. 'It comes directly home to the bosoms and business of men.' The pathos in *Lear* is indeed more dreadful and overpowering: but it is less natural, and less of every day's occurrence. We have not the same degree of sympathy with the passions described in *Macbeth*. The interest in *Hamlet* is more remote and reflex. That of *Othello* is at once equally profound and affecting.

The picturesque contrasts of character in this play are almost as remarkable as the depth of the passion. The Moor Othello, the gentle Desdemona, the villain Iago, the good-natured Cassio, the fool Roderigo, present a range and variety of character as striking and palpable as that produced by the opposition of costume in a picture. Their distinguishing qualities stand out to the mind's eye, so that even when we are not thinking of their actions or sentiments, the idea of their persons is still as present to us as ever. These characters and [200] the images they stamp upon the mind are the farthest asunder possible, the distance between them is immense: yet the compass of knowledge and invention which the poet has shown in embodying these extreme creations of his genius is only greater than the truth and felicity with which he has identified each character with itself, or blended their different qualities together in the same story. What a contrast the character of Othello forms to that of Iago! At the same time, the force of conception with which these two figures are opposed to each other is rendered still more intense by the complete consistency with which the traits of each character are brought out in a state of the highest finishing. The making one black and the other white, the one unprincipled, the other unfortunate in the extreme, would have answered the common purposes of effect, and satisfied the ambition of an ordinary painter of character. Shakespeare has laboured the finer shades of difference in both with as much care and skill as if he had had to depend on the execution alone for the success of his design. On the other hand, Desdemona and Æmilia are not meant to be opposed with anything like strong contrast to each other. Both are, to outward appearance, characters of common life, not more distinguished than women usually are, by difference of rank and situation. The difference of their thoughts and sentiments is however laid open, their minds are separated from each other by signs as plain and as little to be mistaken as the complexions of their husbands. [201]

. . . . .

The character of Iago is one of the supererogations of Shakespear's genius. Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought this whole character unnatural, because his villainy is *without a sufficient motive.* Shakespear, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, is natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt or kill flies for sport. Iago in fact belongs to a class of character, common to Shakespear and at the same time peculiar to him; whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts are hard and callous. Iago is to be sure an extreme instance of the kind; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it [206] falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions. He is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. 'Our ancient' is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in a microscope; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his ingenuity, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui.* His gaiety, such as it is, arises from the success of his treachery; his ease from the torture he has inflicted on others. He is an amateur of tragedy in real life; and instead of employing his invention on imaginary characters, or long-forgotten incidents, he takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his plot at home, casts the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution. We will just give an illustration or two.

One of his most characteristic speeches is that immediately after the marriage of Othello.

> RODERIGO. *What a full fortune does the thick lips owe,*
> *If he can carry her thus!*
> IAGO. *Call up her father:*
> *Rouse him* [Othello] *make after him, poison his delight,*
> *Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,*

And tho' he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: tho' that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on it,
As it may lose some colour.

In the next passage, his imagination runs riot in the mischief he is plotting, and breaks out into the wildness and impetuosity of real enthusiasm.

RODERIGO. *Here is her father's house: I'll call aloud.*
IAGO. *Do, with like timourous accent and dire yell*
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

One of his most favourite topics, on which he is rich indeed, and in descanting on which his spleen serves him for a Muse, is the disproportionate match between Desdemona and the Moor. This is a clue to the character of the lady which he is by no means ready to part with. It is brought forward in the first scene, and he recurs to [207] it, when in answer to his insinuations against Desdemona, Roderigo says,

I cannot believe that in her—she's full of most blest conditions.
IAGO. Bless'd fig's end. The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been blest, she would never have married the Moor.

And again with still more spirit and fatal effect afterwards, when he turns this very suggestion arising in Othello's own breast to her prejudice.

OTHELLO. *And yet how nature erring from itself—*
IAGO. *Ay, there's the point;—as to be bold with you,*
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree, etc.

This is probing to the quick. Iago here turns the character of poor Desdemona, as it were, inside out. It is certain that nothing but the genius of Shakespear could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and have even drawn an additional elegance and dignity from the peculiar circumstances in which she is placed.—The habitual licentiousness of Iago's conversation is not to be traced to the pleasure he takes in gross or lascivious images, but to his desire of finding out the worst side of everything, and of proving himself an over-match for appearances. He has none of 'the milk of human kindness' in his composition. His imagination rejects every thing that

has not a strong infusion of the most unpalatable ingredients; his mind digests only poisons. Virtue or goodness or whatever has the least 'relish of salvation in it,' is, to his depraved appetite, sickly and insipid: and he even resents the good opinion entertained of his own integrity, as if it were an affront cast on the masculine sense and spirit of his character. Thus at the meeting between Othello and Desdemona, he exclaims—'Oh, you are well tuned now: but I'll set down the pegs that make this music, *as honest as I am*'—his character of *bonhommie* not sitting at all easy upon him. In the scenes, where he tries to work Othello to his purpose, he is proportionably guarded, insidious, dark, and deliberate. We believe nothing ever came up to the profound dissimulation and dextrous artifice of the well-known dialogue in the third act, where he first enters upon the execution of his design.

IAGO. *My noble lord.*
OTHELLO. *What dost thou say, Iago?*
IAGO. *Did Michael Cassio,*
When you woo'd my lady, know of your love?
OTHELLO. *He did from first to last.*
Why dost thou ask? [208]
IAGO. *But for a satisfaction of my thought,*
No further harm.
OTHELLO. *Why of thy thought, Iago?*
IAGO. *I did not think he had been acquainted with it.*
OTHELLO. *O yes, and went between us very oft—*
IAGO. *Indeed!*
OTHELLO. *Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught of that?*
Is he not honest?
IAGO. *Honest, my lord?*
OTHELLO. *Honest? Ay, honest.*
IAGO. *My lord, for aught I know.*
OTHELLO. *What do'st thou think?*
IAGO. *Think, my lord!*
OTHELLO. *Think, my lord! Alas, thou echo'st me,*
As if there was some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shewn.—

The stops and breaks, the deep workings of treachery under the mask of love and honesty, the anxious watchfulness, the cool earnestness, and if we may so say, the *passion* of hypocrisy, marked in every line, receive their last finishing in that inconceivable burst of pretended indignation at Othello's doubts of his sincerity.

O grace! O Heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?
God be wi' you; take mine office. O wretched fool,
That lov'st to make thine honesty a vice!
Oh monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world!
To be direct and honest, is not safe.
I thank you for this profit, and from hence
I'll love no friend, since love breeds such offence.

If Iago is detestable enough when he has business on his hands and all his engines at work, he is still worse when he has nothing to do, and we only see into the hollowness of his heart. His indifference when Othello falls into a swoon, is perfectly diabolical.

IAGO. *How is it, General? Have you not hurt your head?*
OTHELLO. *Do'st thou mock me?*
IAGO. *I mock you not, by Heaven,* etc.

The part indeed would hardly be tolerated, even as a foil to the virtue and generosity of the other characters in the play, but for its indefatigable industry and inexhaustible resources, which divert the attention of the spectator (as well as his own) from the end he has in view to the means by which it must be accomplished.—Edmund the Bastard in *Lear* is something of the same character, placed in less prominent circumstances. [209]

Othello: Pure Melodrama

G. B. SHAW

"Othello" . . . is pure melodrama. There is not a touch of character in it that goes below the skin; and the fitful attempts to make Iago something better than a melodramatic villain only make a hopeless mess of him and his motives. To any one capable of reading the play with an open mind as to its merits, it is obvious that Shakespeare plunged through it so impetuously that he had it finished before he had made up his mind as to the character and motives of a single person in it. Probably it was not until he stumbled into the sentimental fit in which he introduced the willow song that he saw his way through without making Desdemona enough of the "supersubtle Venetian" of Iago's description to strengthen the case for Othello's jealousy. That jealousy, by the way, is purely melodramatic jealousy. The real article is to be found later on in "A Winter's Tale," where Leontes is an unmistakable study of a jealous man from life. But when the worst has been said of "Othello" that can be provoked by its superficiality and staginess, it remains magnificent by the volume of its passion and the splendor of its word-music, which sweep the scenes up to a plane on which sense is drowned in sound. The words do not convey ideas: they are streaming ensigns and tossing branches to make the tempest of passion visible. In this passage, for instance:

Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on [276]
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
E'en so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up,

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if Othello cannot turn his voice into a thunder and surge of passion, he will achieve nothing but a ludicrously misplaced bit of geography. If in the last scene he cannot throw the darkness of night and the shadow of death over such lines as

I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume,

he at once becomes a person who, on his way to commit a pettish murder, stops to philosophize foolishly about a candle end. The actor cannot help himself by studying his part acutely; for there is nothing to study in it. Tested by the brain, it is ridiculous: tested by the ear, it is sublime. He must have the orchestral quality in him; and as that is a matter largely of physical endowment, it follows that only an actor of certain physical endowments can play Othello. Let him be as crafty as he likes without that, he can no more get the effect than he can sound the bottom C on a violoncello. The note is not there, that is all; and he had better be content to play Iago, which is within the compass of any clever actor of normal endowments.

When I have said that Mr. Wilson Barrett has not this special musical and vocal gift, I have said everything needful; for in this matter a miss is as good as a mile. It is of no use to speak "Farewell the tranquil mind"; for the more intelligently and reasonably it is spoken the more absurd it is. It must affect us as "Ora per sempre [277] addio, sante memorie" affects us when sung by Tamagno [in Verdi's *Otello*]. Mr. Wilson Barrett is an unmusical speaker except when he is talking Manx. He chops and drives his phrases like a smart carpenter with a mallet and chisel, hitting all the prepositions and conjunctions an extra hard rap; and he has a positive genius for misquotation. For example:

Of one that loved not wisely but well

and

Drop tears down faster than the Arabian trees,

both of which appear to me to bear away the palm from Miss Achurch's

By the scandering of this pelleted storm.

It is a pity that he is not built to fit Othello; for he produces the play, as usual, very well. At the Lyceum every one is bored to madness the

moment Sir Henry Irving and Miss Terry leave the stage: at the Lyric, as aforetime at the Princess's, the play goes briskly from beginning to end; and there are always three or four successes in smaller parts sparkling round Mr. Barrett's big part. Thus Mr. Wigne Percyval, the first Cassio I ever saw get over the difficulty of appearing a responsible officer and a possible successor for Othello with nothing but a drunken scene to do it in, divides the honors of the second act with Iago; and Mr. Ambrose Manning is interesting and amusing all through as Roderigo. Mr. Franklin McLeay, as Iago, makes him the hero of the performance. But the character defies all consistency. Shakespeare, as usual, starts with a rough general notion of a certain type of individual, and then throws it over [278] at the first temptation. Iago begins as a coarse blackguard, whose jovial bluntness passes as "honesty," and who is professionally a routine subaltern incapable of understanding why a mathematician gets promoted over his head. But the moment a stage effect can be made, or a fine speech brought off by making him refined, subtle and dignified, he is set talking like Hamlet, and becomes a godsend to students of the "problems" presented by our divine William's sham characters. Mr. McLeay does all that an actor can do with him. He follows Shakespeare faithfully on the rails and off them. He plays the jovial blackguard to Cassio and Roderigo and the philosopher and mentor to Othello just as the lines lead him, with perfect intelligibility and with so much point, distinction and fascination that the audience loads him with compliments, and the critics all make up their minds to declare that he shows the finest insight into the many-sided and complex character of the prince of villains. As to Miss Maud Jeffries, I came to the conclusion when she sat up in bed and said, "Why I should fear, I know not" with pretty petulance, that she did not realize the situation a bit; but her voice was so pathetically charming and musical, and she so beautiful a woman, that I hasten to confess that I never saw a Desdemona I liked better. Miss Frances Ivor, always at her best in Shakespeare, should not on that account try to deliver the speech about "lashing the rascal naked through the world" in the traditional Mrs. Crummles manner. Emilia's really interesting speeches, which contain some of Shakespeare's curious anticipations of modern ideas, were of course cut; but Miss Ivor, in what was left, proved her aptitude for Shakespearean work, of which I self-denyingly wish her all possible abundance. [279]

Mr. Barrett's best scene is that in which he reads the despatch

brought by Lodovico. His worst—leaving out of account those torrential outbreaks of savagery for which he is too civilized—is the second act. The storm, the dread of shipwreck, the darkness, the fierce riot, the "dreadful bell that frights the isle from its propriety," are not only not suggested, but contradicted, by the scenery and management. We are shown a delightful Mediterranean evening; the bell is as pretty as an operatic angelus; Othello comes in like a temperance lecturer; Desdemona does not appear; and the exclamation,

> *Look, if my gentle love be not raised up—*
> *I'll make thee an example,*

becomes a ludicrously schoolmasterly "I'll make thee an example," twice repeated. Here Mr. Barrett makes the Moor priggish instead of simple, as Shakespeare meant him to be in the moments when he meant anything beyond making effective stage points. [280]

The Noble Othello

A. C. BRADLEY

Othello is, in one sense of the word, by far the most romantic figure among Shakespeare's heroes; and he is so partly from the strange life of war and adventure which he has lived from childhood. He does not belong to our world, and he seems to enter it we know not whence —almost as if from wonderland. There is something mysterious in his descent from men of royal siege; in his wanderings in vast deserts and among marvellous peoples; in his tales of magic handkerchiefs and prophetic Sibyls; in the sudden vague glimpses we get of numberless battles and sieges in which he has played the hero and has borne a charmed life; even in chance references to his baptism, his being sold to slavery, his sojourn in Aleppo.

And he is not merely a romantic figure; his own nature is romantic. He has not, indeed, the meditative or speculative imagination of Hamlet; but in the strictest sense of the word he is more poetic than Hamlet. Indeed, if one recalls Othello's most famous speeches—those that begin, 'Her father loved me,' 'O now for ever,' 'Never, Iago,' 'Had it pleased Heaven,' 'It is the cause,' 'Behold, I have a weapon,' 'Soft you, a word or two [153] before you go'—and if one places side by side with these speeches an equal number by any other hero, one will not doubt that Othello is the greatest poet of them all. There is the same poetry in his casual phrases—like 'These nine moons wasted,' 'Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,' 'You chaste stars,' 'It is a sword of Spain, the ice-brook's temper,' 'It is the very error of the moon'—and in those brief expressions of intense feeling which ever since have been taken as the absolute expression, like

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If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate,

or

If she be false, O then Heaven mocks itself,
I'll not believe it;

or

No, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand,

or

But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!

or

O thou weed,
Who are so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne'er been born.

And this imagination, we feel, has accompanied his whole life. He has watched with a poet's eye the Arabian trees dropping their med'cinable gum, and the Indian throwing away his chance-found pearl; and has gazed in a fascinated dream at the Pontic sea rushing, never to return, to the Propontic and the Hellespont; and has felt as no other man ever felt (for he speaks of it as none other ever did) the poetry of the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war. [154]

So he comes before us, dark and grand, with a light upon him from the sun where he was born; but no longer young, and now grave, self-controlled, steeled by the experience of countless perils, hardships and vicissitudes, at once simple and stately in bearing and in speech, a great man naturally modest but fully conscious of his worth, proud of his services to the state, unawed by dignitaries and unelated by honours, secure, it would seem, against all dangers from without and all rebellion from within. And he comes to have his life crowned with the final glory of love, a love as strange, adventurous and romantic as any passage of his eventful history, filling his heart with tenderness and his imagination with ecstasy. For there is no love, not that of Romeo in his youth, more steeped in imagination than Othello's.

The sources of danger in this character are revealed but too clearly by the story. In the first place, Othello's mind, for all its poetry, is very

simple. He is not observant. His nature tends outward. He is quite free from introspection, and is not given to reflection. Emotion excites his imagination, but it confuses and dulls his intellect. On this side he is the very opposite of Hamlet, with whom, however, he shares a great openness and trustfulness of nature. In addition, he has little experience of the corrupt products of civilised life, and is ignorant of European women.

In the second place, for all his dignity and massive calm (and he has greater dignity than any other of Shakespeare's men), he is by nature full of the most vehement passion. Shakespeare emphasises his self-control, not only by the wonderful pictures of the First Act, but by references to the past. Lodovico, amazed at his violence, exclaims:

> *Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate*
> *Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature*
> *Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue*
> *The shot of accident nor dart of chance*
> *Could neither graze nor pierce?*

Iago, who has here no motive for lying, asks:

> *Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon*
> *When it hath blown his ranks into the air,* [155]
> *And, like the devil, from his very arm*
> *Puffed his own brother—and can he be angry?*

This, and other aspects of his character, are best exhibited by a single line—one of Shakespeare's miracles—the words by which Othello silences in a moment the night-brawl between his attendants and those of Brabantio:

> *Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.*

And the same self-control is strikingly shown where Othello endeavours to elicit some explanation of the fight between Cassio and Montano. Here, however, there occur ominous words, which make us feel how necessary was this self-control, and make us admire it the more:

> *Now, by heaven,*
> *My blood begins my safer guides to rule,*
> *And passion, having my best judgment collied,*
> *Assays to lead the way.*

We remember these words later, when the sun of reason is 'collied,' blackened and blotted out in total eclipse.

Lastly, Othello's nature is all of one piece. His trust, where he trusts, is absolute. Hesitation is almost impossible to him. He is extremely self-reliant, and decides and acts instantaneously. If stirred to indignation, as 'in Aleppo once,' he answers with one lightning stroke. Love, if he loves, must be to him the heaven where either he must live or bear no life. If such a passion as jealousy seizes him, it will swell into a well-nigh incontrollable flood. He will press for immediate conviction or immediate relief. Convinced, he will act with the authority of a judge and the swiftness of a man in mortal pain. Undeceived, he will do like execution on himself.

This character is so noble, Othello's feelings and actions follow so inevitably from it and from the forces brought to bear on it, and his sufferings are so heart-rending, that he stirs, I believe, in most readers a passion of mingled love and pity which they feel for no other hero in Shakespeare, and to which not even Mr. Swinburne can do more than justice. Yet there are some critics and not a few readers who cherish a grudge against him. They do not merely think that in the later stages of his temptation he showed a certain obtuseness, and that, to speak pedantically, he acted with unjustifiable precipitance and violence; no one, I suppose, denies that. But, even when they admit that he was not of a jealous temper, they consider that he *was* 'easily jealous'; they seem to think that it was inexcusable in him to feel any suspicion of his wife at all; and they blame him for never suspecting Iago or asking him for evidence. I refer to this attitude of mind chiefly in order to draw attention to certain points in the story. It comes partly from mere inattention (for Othello did suspect Iago and did ask him for evidence); partly from a misconstruction of the text which makes Othello appear jealous long before he really is so; and partly from failure to realise certain essential facts. I will begin with these.

(1) Othello, we have seen, was trustful, and thorough in his trust. He put entire confidence in the honesty of Iago, who had not only been his companion in arms, but, as he believed, had just proved his faithfulness in the matter of the marriage. This confidence was misplaced, and we happen to know it; but it was no sign of stupidity in Othello. For his opinion of Iago was the opinion of practically everyone who knew him: and that opinion was that Iago was before all things 'honest,' his very faults being those of excess in honesty. This being so, even if Othello had not been trustful and simple, it would have been quite unnatural in him to be unmoved by the warnings of so honest a friend, warnings offered with extreme reluctance and mani-

festly from a sense of a friend's duty. *Any* husband would have been troubled by them.

(2) Iago does not bring these warnings to a husband who had lived with a wife for months and years and knew her like his sister or his bosom-friend. Nor is there any ground in Othello's character for supposing that, if he had been such a man, he would have felt and acted as he does in the play. But he was newly married; in the circumstances he cannot have known much of Desdemona before his marriage; and further he was conscious of being under the spell of a feeling which can give glory to the truth but can also give it to a dream.

(3) This consciousness in any imaginative man is enough, in such circumstances, to destroy his confidence in his powers of [157] perception. In Othello's case, after a long and most artful preparation, there now comes, to reinforce its effect, the suggestions that he is not an Italian, nor even a European; that he is totally ignorant of the thoughts and the customary morality of Venetian women; that he had himself seen in Desdemona's deception of her father how perfect an actress she could be. As he listens in horror, for a moment at least the past is revealed to him in a new and dreadful light, and the ground seems to sink under his feet. These suggestions are followed by a tentative but hideous and humiliating insinuation of what his honest and much-experienced friend fears may be the true explanation of Desdemona's rejection of acceptable suitors, and of her strange, and naturally temporary, preference for a black man. Here Iago goes too far. He sees something in Othello's face that frightens him, and he breaks off. Nor does this idea take any hold of Othello's mind. But it is not surprising that his utter powerlessness to repel it on the ground of knowledge of his wife, or even of that instinctive interpretation of character which is possible between persons of the same race, should complete his misery, so that he feels he can bear no more, and abruptly dismisses his friend (III. iii. 238).

Now I repeat that *any* man situated as Othello was would have been disturbed by Iago's communications, and I add that many men would have been made wildly jealous. But up to this point, where Iago is dismissed, Othello, I must maintain, does not show jealousy. His confidence is shaken, he is confused and deeply troubled, he feels even horror; but he is not yet jealous in the proper sense of that word. In his soliloquy (III. iii. 258ff.) the beginning of this passion may be traced; but it is only after an interval of solitude, when he has had time to dwell on the idea presented to him, and especially after state-

ments of fact, not mere general grounds of suspicion, are offered, that the passion lays hold of him. Even then, however, and indeed to the very end, he is quite unlike the essentially jealous man, quite unlike Leontes. No doubt the thought of another man's possessing the woman he loves is intolerable to him; no doubt the sense of insult and the impulse of revenge are at times most violent; and these are the feelings of jealousy proper. But these are not the chief or the deepest source of [158] Othello's suffering. It is the wreck of his faith and his love. It is the feeling,

If she be false, oh then Heaven mocks itself;

the feeling,

O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!

the feeling,

But there where I have garner'd up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up—to be discarded thence. . . .

You will find nothing like this in Leontes.

Up to this point, it appears to me, there is not a syllable to be said against Othello. But the play is a tragedy, and from this point we may abandon the ungrateful and undramatic task of awarding praise and blame. When Othello, after a brief interval, re-enters (III. iii. 330), we see at once that the poison has been at work, and 'burns like the mines of sulphur.'

Look where he comes! Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday.

He is 'on the rack,' in an agony so unbearable that he cannot endure the sight of Iago. Anticipating the probability that Iago has spared him the whole truth, he feels that in that case his life is over and his 'occupation gone' with all its glories. But he has not abandoned hope. The bare possibility that his friend is deliberately deceiving him—though such a deception would be a thing so monstrously wicked that he can hardly conceive it credible—is a kind of hope. He furiously demands proof, ocular proof. And when he is compelled to see that he is demanding an impossibility he still demands evidence. He forces

it from the unwilling witness, and hears the maddening tale of Cassio's dream. It is enough. And if it were not enough, has he not sometimes seen a handkerchief spotted with strawberries in his wife's hand? Yes, it was his first gift to her. [159]

> *I know not that; but such a handkerchief—*
> *I am sure it was your wife's—did I to-day*
> *See Cassio wipe his beard with.*

'If it be that,' he answers—but what need to test the fact? The 'madness of revenge' is in his blood, and hesitation is a thing he never knew. He passes judgment, and controls himself only to make his sentence a solemn vow.

The Othello of the Fourth Act is Othello in his fall. His fall is never complete, but he is much changed. Towards the close of the Temptation-scene he becomes at times most terrible, but his grandeur remains almost undiminished. Even in the following scene (III. iv.), where he goes to test Desdemona in the matter of the handkerchief, and receives a fatal confirmation of her guilt, our sympathy with him is hardly touched by any feeling of humiliation. But in the Fourth Act 'Chaos has come.' A slight interval of time may be admitted here. It is but slight; for it was necessary for Iago to hurry on, and terribly dangerous to leave a chance for a meeting of Cassio with Othello; and his insight into Othello's nature taught him that his plan was to deliver blow on blow, and never to allow his victim to recover from the confusion of the first shock. Still there is a slight interval; and when Othello reappears we see at a glance that he is a changed man. He is physically exhausted, and his mind is dazed. He sees everything blurred through a mist of blood and tears. He has actually forgotten the incident of the handkerchief, and has to be reminded of it. When Iago, perceiving that he can now risk almost any lie, tells him that Cassio has confessed his guilt, Othello, the hero who has seemed to us only second to Coriolanus in physical power, trembles all over; he mutters disjointed words; a blackness suddenly intervenes between his eyes and the world; he takes it for the shuddering testimony of nature to the horror he has just heard, and he falls senseless to the ground. When he recovers it is to watch Cassio, as he imagines, laughing over his shame. It is an imposition so gross, and should have been one so perilous, that Iago would never have ventured it before. But he is safe now. The sight only adds to the confusion of intellect the madness of rage; and a ravenous thirst for revenge, contending with

motions of infinite longing and regret, conquers them. The [160] delay till night-fall is torture to him. His self-control has wholly deserted him, and he strikes his wife in the presence of the Venetian envoy. He is so lost to all sense of reality that he never asks himself what will follow the deaths of Cassio and his wife. An ineradicable instinct of justice, rather than any last quiver of hope, leads him to question Emilia; but nothing could convince him now, and there follows the dreadful scene of accusation; and then, to allow us the relief of burning hatred and burning tears, the interview of Desdemona with Iago, and that last talk of hers with Emilia, and her last song.

But before the end there is again a change. The supposed death of Cassio (V. i.) satiates the thirst for vengeance. The Othello who enters the bed-chamber with the words,

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,

is not the man of the Fourth Act. The deed he is bound to do is no murder, but a sacrifice. He is to save Desdemona from herself, not in hate but in honour; in honour, and also in love. His anger has passed; a boundless sorrow has taken its place; and

this sorrow's heavenly:
It strikes where it doth love.

Even when, at the sight of her apparent obduracy, and at the hearing of words which by a crowning fatality can only reconvince him of her guilt, these feelings give way to others, it is to righteous indignation they give way, not to rage; and, terribly painful as this scene is, there is almost nothing here to diminish the admiration and love which heighten pity. And pity itself vanishes, and love and admiration alone remain, in the majestic dignity and sovereign ascendancy of the close. Chaos has come and gone; and the Othello of the Council-chamber and the quay of Cyprus has returned, or a greater and nobler Othello still. As he speaks those final words in which all the glory and agony of his life—long ago in India and Arabia and Aleppo, and afterwards in Venice, and now in Cyprus—seem to pass before us, like the pictures that flash before the eyes of a drowning man, a triumphant scorn for the fetters of the flesh and the littleness of all the lives that must survive him sweeps [161] our grief away, and when he dies upon a kiss the most painful of all tragedies leaves us for the moment free from pain, and exulting in the power of 'love and man's unconquerable mind.' [162]

Othello: Tragedy of Effect

ELMER EDGAR STOLL

In Cinthio there is no warrant for introducing the supernatural; but in Shakespeare's hands the villain takes the place of Fate—of the Weird Sisters and the Lady—and more completely than is usual in the tragedy of the Renaissance. He is a devil in the flesh, as Booth played him, as Coleridge and Lamb implied, and George Woodberry, J. J. Chapman, Lytton Strachey, John Palmer, not to mention others, have put it explicitly.[1] Iago himself practically acknowledges it in the soliloquies—"Hell and night," "Divinity of hell! when devils will the blackest sins put on"—and on that point apparently he and Othello at the end are agreed:

> *If that thou beest a devil, I cannot kill thee—*
> [wounds Iago]
> *I bleed, sir, but not kill'd.*

Before that, to be sure, the Ancient is misapprehended by everybody; yet as Fate, as master of the show, he is holding nearly all the strings of the action in hand, and leading [300] both heroine and hero to destruction. In the victim now, not the victimizer, is the great change; but from good to evil only under a complete delusion—"be thou my good" he neither says nor thinks, and the prince of villains himself has no need to say it. For again, as in *Macbeth,* the motives are dispensed with. The Ensign of the *novella* is deprived of the internal incentives to his wickedness, and the Moor relieved of the traits which might have provoked or somewhat warranted it.

As Professor Wolfgang Keller notices, the villainy is "better motived" in the source. That is, more plausibly, more realistically. Not a devil in the flesh, a "black angel," as Mr. Chapman calls him, Cin-

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thio's Ensign is still of "the most depraved nature in the world" (*della più scelerata natura che mai fosse huomo del mondo*). But as such he has provocation enough. He is a rejected suitor, and really suspects the Captain (Shakespeare's Cassio) of being the favored one. Against both him and the lady he has a grudge; his love for her is turned to the "bitterest hate"; whereas in the tragedy his love for Desdemona and her intrigue with Cassio are, like Cassio's and Othello's with Emilia, pretexts and afterthoughts. There he has need of these. His genuine reason for resentment is against Othello, but only for promoting Cassio above him, and against Cassio (incidentally) for being promoted. In soliloquy, as always in drama, the truth will out. "I hate the Moor," he mutters,

> *And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets*
> *He has done my office.*

And the next moment the pretext is made still plainer: "I know not if't be true, but I for mere suspicion in that kind will do as if for surety." [2]

So the Ensign is deprived of his motive as much as the Thane of Glamis—as much as Richard III of his, which was ambition, or as Goneril and Regan of theirs, which was [301] envy,[3]—but without an external Fate to relieve him of the burden of his iniquity. He carries it indeed, like the Weird Sisters, lightly enough; and the Aristotelian contrast of the good man doing the deed of horror is presented in his victim, who, however, unlike Macbeth, is guilty only of a mistake in judgment—the *hamartia*—and is far from uttering Satan's cry. Othello never loses our sympathy, as Macbeth, despite the poignant presentation of his sufferings, cannot but in some measure do.

What is almost quite as important to the emotional effect—to the steep tragic contrast—as the apparently unmitigated wickedness of Iago, is, as in the Caledonian tragedy, the nature of the victim and the circumstances of the crime. As we have seen, Shakespeare's Moor has changed places with his wife in the villain's enmity. Love turned to hatred is too ambiguous and appealing a passion—it is that, moreover, into which the Moor himself is precipitated, and, as Strachey observes, the villain's must not be anything of a parallel. For the contrast, again, it must not be. Moreover, though Cinthio's Moor is given some noble and attractive traits, especially at the outset, Shakespeare's is both there and throughout on a far higher level of intelligence and feeling. He is not a stupid dupe or a vulgarly vindic-

tive cuckold. He is not the man to call the informer in to do the killing, or the concealing of it afterwards. For his own safety, Shakespeare's, unlike Cinthio's Moor, shows no concern. Nor is there, for that matter, the slightest evidence in his conduct or his utterance, nor in the woman's either, of the love Iago suspects between him and Emilia—no more than there is in Iago's own conduct or utterance, indeed, of his own love for Desdemona—though of late there has been a fairly prominent critic to say there is.[4] That would [302] be like thinking, with some Germans, that Hamlet had betrayed Ophelia, for which, to be sure, there is a little evidence, though far from enough; or with some Frenchmen, that Lady Macbeth, as, reenacting in memory the deed of blood, she whispers, "to bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate . . . to bed, to bed, to bed," she, having enticed her husband, is now for rewarding him. On the contrary, the black man is made the grandest and noblest of Shakespeare's lovers; and it is only through Iago's overwhelming reputation for honesty and sagacity, the impenetrableness of his mask together with the potency of his seductive arts, that he is led astray and succumbs. For the highest tragic effect it is the great and good man that succumbs. Like other supreme artists, Shakespeare has here created his own world, which holds together. Like Corneille (*les grands sujets de la tragédie doivent toujours aller au delá du vraisemblable*) Goethe holds that in *den höheren Rigionen des kunstlerischen Verfahrens, hat der Künstler ein freieres Spiel, und er darf sogar zu Fiktionen schreiten.*[5] This Shakespeare boldly does. No one else sees through Iago, including his own wife; so Othello, for not seeing, is no gull or dupe. In the matter of the Ancient's cleverness in maneuver and also of his success in hypocrisy the English is a little indebted to the Italian writer; but the Ensign's wife does see through him and only for fear of him holds her tongue.

In both *Macbeth* and *Othello,* then, it is the whole situation that is mainly important, not the character; it is the reciprocal matter of motivation (whether present or missing), of defects or qualities in both victim and victimizer together. Here lies the chief point of the present discussion. [303] What if Shakespeare's Macbeth and Duncan had been like Holinshed's, or like Henry IV and Richard II, or like Cromwell and Charles I? And as I have elsewhere said, "How the scope and stature of Iago's wickedness (and of Othello's virtue) would be limited by any adequate grudge!" [6] How they would be also

by a credulous or suspicious nature—a predisposition or a psychology —in the hero! Against that Shakespeare has guarded not only by Iago's impregnable reputation and by his all-prevailing arts but also by Othello's own reputation for capability and for virtue. (A world of reputation and circumstance here, not of motive!) Before the temptation begins, as in *Macbeth,* but much more fully and felicitously, the Moor has not only in his own right but through the admiration of everybody (and here even of the villain) been firmly established in our good opinion and our sympathies. So with Desdemona, too, and she is not deceitful or supersubtle as Mr. Shaw would have her, not enough so "to strengthen the case for Othello's jealousy"; the dramatic preparations are emotional, not analytical and psychological, primarily for the situation, not the character. And both women, Emilia at the last and Desdemona once the action is well started, are shocked at the discoveries they make in their husbands. But she is justified, when hers gives signs of jealousy, in being unable to believe it; "not easily jealous" he himself says (where a Shakespearean hero, or his best friend, is expected to know and everything comes to light) at the end. Even Iago, hearing that Othello is angry, exclaims,

> *and is he angry?*
> *Something of moment, then. I will go meet him.*
> *There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry.*

And in the fourth act, when the jealous rage is fully upon him, Lodovico, newly come from Venice, is moved to wonder and to grief.

> *Is this the nature*
> *Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue*
> *The shot of accident nor dart of chance*
> *Could neither graze nor pierce?* [304]

"He is much chang'd," Iago coolly, and still not superfluously, replies. So he is, until, in the last scene, by Emilia's disclosures and Iago's self-betraying resentment, he recovers something of his old stately and generous self.

Macbeth too is changed, but for once and all. Othello had suffered from an overpowering delusion, and has just now, he thinks, performed an act of justice. Macbeth, not deluded, has come under the dominion of evil, his "eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man." Neither change is probable. In neither is there much of what can be called psychology. In life neither person would really have done what he did. In both tragedy and comedy, however, that is not

exactly what is to be expected: for a Henry IV, a Cromwell, we should turn to history, not the stage. What is expected is what from life we do not get—enlargement, excitement, another world, not a copy of this. And that airy edifice, an imaginative structure, is the emotionally consistent story or situation as a whole,—the conduct of characters both active and passive, perhaps also a motiving both external and internal, but in any case an interplay of relations or circumstances as important as the motives themselves; not to mention the apportionment of emphasis or relief whether in the framework or the expression, the poetry that informs both, and the individuality of the speech, which, real, though poetical, leads one to accept and delight in the improbable things said or done. "It is when their minds (those of the audience) are preoccupied with his personality," says Dr. Bridges of Macbeth, "that the actions follow as unquestionable realities." [7] Not merely, that is, when the actions proceed from the character; and the convincing quality of the speech is only a participating element in the consistent overpowering imaginative and emotional effect of the whole.

"In tragedy and comedy both," I have said elsewhere, "life must be, as it has ever been, piled on life, or we have visited the theater in vain." It is not primarily to present [305] characters in their convincing reality that Shakespeare and the Greeks have written, nor in an action strictly and wholly of their doing, but to set them in a state of high commotion, and thus to move and elevate the audience in turn. And here I fall back upon the authority of Mr. Santayana, a philosopher (but also a poet and critic) who, without my knowledge until of late,[8] expressed, though from a different point of view, similar opinions before me:

> Artistotle was justified in making the plot the chief element in fiction; for it is by virtue of the plot that the characters live, or, rather, that we live in them, and by virtue of the plot accordingly that our soul rises to the imaginative activity by which we tend at once to escape from the personal life and to realise its ideal. . . .

And as the eminent critic proceeds, he maintains that poetry is not

> at its best when it depicts a further possible experience, but when it initiates us, by feigning something which as an experience is impossible, into the meaning of the experience which we have actually had.

And that is partly because "in the theater," as the producer Mr. Robert Edmond Jones has assured us, "the actual thing is never the exciting

thing. Unless life is turned into art on the stage it stops being alive and goes dead." [9] It is by the excitement that the meaning is brought home to us. [306]

NOTES

[1] For their opinions see my *Shakespeare and Other Masters,* pp. 233, 238, 243–44.

[2] Cf. *Shakespeare and Other Masters,* pp. 236–38, for the way that his suspicions become convictions.

[3] In the old *King Leir,* envy of Cordelia's beauty, cf. E. E. Kellett, *Suggestions* (1923), p. 38. For Richard, cf. Brandl, *Shakespeare* (1937), p. 120.

[4] It is of course not enough to urge the probabilities upon us—that a healthy and vigorous soldier of the time would lead "a *man's* life," and that Emilia was none too good for taking up with him. As I have repeatedly reminded my readers, no character in fiction has a private life, beyond the reach of the writer, which a character in a biography or history, on the other hand, has, not being the writer's own creation. And in Shakespearean drama, as in the ancient or the classical French, none has the "past" or the "love life" that is more readily expected, and so more easily suggested, today. Cf. chap. VIII, above.

[5] Eckermann, April 18, 1827.—I hope Corneille here does not go beyond the endurable.

[6] *Shakespeare and Other Masters,* p. 245.

[7] *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama.*

[8] *Poetry and Religion* (1900). Cf. my *Shakespeare and Other Masters,* p. 369. The passage here quoted is as in the *Works* (Scribner, N. Y., 1936) ii.

[9] *The Dramatic Imagination* (1941), p. 82 (quoted by W. W. Lawrence, *Modern Language Review,* October, 1942, p. 424).

The Hero Cheering Himself Up

T. S. ELIOT

. . . There is, in some of the great tragedies of Shakespeare, a new attitude. It is not the attitude of Seneca, but is derived from Seneca; it is slightly different from anything that can be found in French tragedy, in Corneille or in Racine; it is modern, and it culminates, if there is ever any culmination, in the attitude of Nietzsche. I cannot say that it is Shakespeare's "philosophy." Yet many people have lived by it; though it may only have been Shakespeare's instinctive recognition of something of theatrical utility. It is the attitude of self-dramatization assumed by some of Shakespeare's heroes at moments of tragic intensity. It is not peculiar to Shakespeare; it is conspicuous in Chapman; Bussy, Clermont and Biron, all die in this way. Marston —one of the most interesting and least explored of all the Elizabethans —uses it; and Marston and Chapman were particularly Senecan. But Shakespeare, of course, does it very much better than any of the others, and makes it somehow more integral with the human nature of his characters. It is less verbal, more real. I have always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness—of universal human weakness—than the last great speech of Othello. I am ignorant whether any one else has ever adopted this view, and it may appear subjective and fantastic in the extreme. It is usually taken on its face value, as expressing the greatness in defeat of a noble but erring nature.

Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't,—

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No more of that.—I pray you, in your letters, [110]
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
And say, besides,—that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus.

What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is cheering himself up. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself. Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself. Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatising himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself. I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this *bovarysme,* the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare.

If you compare the deaths of several of Shakespeare's heroes—I do not say all, for there are very few generalizations that can be applied to the whole of Shakespeare's work—but notably Othello, Coriolanus and Antony—with the deaths of heroes of dramatists such as Marston and Chapman, consciously under Senecan influence, you will find a strong similarity—except only that Shakespeare does it both more poetically and more lifelike.

You may say that Shakespeare is merely illustrating, consciously or unconsciously, human nature, not Seneca. But I am [111] not so much concerned with the influence of Seneca on Shakespeare as with Shakespeare's illustration of Senecan and stoical principles. Much of Chapman's Senecanism has lately been shown by Professor Schoell to be directly borrowed from Erasmus and other sources. I am con-

cerned with the fact that Seneca is the literary representative of Roman stoicism, and that Romon stoicism is an important ingredient in Elizabethan drama. It was natural that in a time like that of Elizabeth stoicism should appear. The original stoicism, and especially the Roman stoicism, was of course a philosophy suited to slaves: hence its absorption into early Christianity.

> *A man to join himself with the Universe*
> *In his main sway, and make in all things fit—*

A man does not join himself with the Universe so long as he has anything else to join himself with; men who could take part in the life of a thriving Greek city-state had something better to join themselves to; and Christians have had something better. Stoicism is the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him; it is the permanent substratum of a number of versions of cheering oneself up. Nietzsche is the most conspicuous modern instance of cheering oneself up. The stoical attitude is the reverse of Christian humility. [112]

The Modern Othello

LEO KIRSCHBAUM

Is the Othello of modern critics Shakespeare's Othello?

Here are three representative opinions. To Sir Edmund Chambers, Othello is "the simple open-hearted soldier," "a gracious and doomed creature" who is an "easy victim." [1] For Kittredge, he is "an heroic and simple nature, putting full trust in two friends, both of whom betray him, the one in angry malice, the other by weakness and self-seeking." [2] Stoll sees him as a very noble dramatic puppet who evinces no psychological consistency in his passage from love to sudden jealousy and who must fall because of the dramatic device that every one trusts the villain: Iago is Othello's nemesis.[3]

I do not think that this Othello is Shakespeare's Othello. I do not think that this is the Othello whom the judicious reader or spectator or actor sees. I do not think that this is the Othello whom an Elizabethan audience saw. Theodore Spencer is more cautious: "It is solely because Othello is the kind of man that he is that a man like Iago can destroy him." [4] Yet what kind of man is the Moor? I think that Shakespeare gave the answer partially by means of contrast within the play.

Consider the following speech of Iago to Roderigo in I, ii, when the latter says that it is not in his power to control his love for Desdemona: [283]

> . . . 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures

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would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

Shakespeare, says Kittredge, uses Iago "for the utterance of great truths." "Of all these the most remarkable is his sublime assertion (to Roderigo) of the supremacy of will and reason in the cultivation of the moral faculties. . . . That is a saying of which Hamlet himself might be proud, and to which the noble Brutus would assent with enthusiasm." [5] Yet Iago's statement is simple Christian catechism. It is "the true doctrine" which is uttered by Jack Cade in the *Mirror for Magistrates*.[6] If this doctrine be noble, then the Othello of modern critics is not noble, for they assert that he is not the maker of his own destiny: Iago is. But if we are going to insist on understanding Elizabethan dramatic artifice, let us also insist on examining *Othello* according to the traditional values which Shakespeare has injected implicitly and explicitly into the play. Actually by stressing Othello's innocence, modern critics have robbed the character of what the Elizabethans considered man's highest dignity—his own responsibility for his own life and character. Othello is less innocuous than modern critics conceive him because he ultimately is responsible for his terrible fate. On the other hand, precisely because of this responsibility, he possesses a stature as tragic protagonist which without this responsibility he could not possess.

Modern critics exonerate Othello. The noble hero is not responsible for the catastrophe. It is the devil-man, Iago, who is. But Othello is not the only noble character in the play who falls because of the wiles of Iago. Cassio does too. But Cassio does not excuse himself of culpability. He, too, follows the [284] doctrine laid down by Iago above. Let us examine II. iii. 278–312. Knowing that he should not drink, Cassio has listened to the tempter, Iago, has become drunk in consequence, has created a scene, and has been dismissed from office:

CAS. I will rather sue to be despis'd than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer. Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou invisible spirit to wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil! . . . I remember a mass of things, but nothing distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore. O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!

IAGO. Why, but you are now well enough. How come you thus recovered?

CAS. It hath pleas'd the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath. One unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly despise myself.

IAGO. Come, you are too severe a moraler. As the time, the place, and the condition of this country stands, I could heartily wish this had not befallen; but since it is as it is, mend it for your own good.

CAS. I will ask him for my place again; he shall tell me I am a drunkard! Had I as many mouth as Hydra, such an answer would stop them all. To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unbless'd and the ingredient is a devil.

Clearly Cassio considers that his succumbing to the devil was his own fault. He does not exonerate himself of responsibility for his own ruin. An Elizabethan audience would not have understood a dramatist who implied that the Devil was man's nemesis. Man had free will.

But, says Stoll constantly, the question of free will does not enter into the matter of Othello's believing Iago. It is a dramatic convention that Iago's mask is impenetrable. All the characters believe him to be honest. Hence, Othello must believe Iago's slander against Desdemona.

It is true that Shakespeare has artfully maintained the fiction of Iago's honesty among the dramatis personae. But Shakespeare is more artful than Stoll notes. There are three clean-cut occasions in the play when the characters do not believe Iago. And each of these occasions occurs when he suggests that [285] Desdemona is unchaste! Or let us put the matter a different way. Iago tells four of the characters that Desdemona is unchaste—and the only one who believes this accusation is Othello! It may be stated categorically that, contrary to Stoll, Shakespeare has underlined the premise that Othello need not have believed Iago's imputations.

In II. i. after the arrival scene in Cyprus, Iago asserts to Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio (220–1) "With him? Why, 'tis not possible." Iago persists (223–53): Cassio is "a pestilent complete knave, and the woman hath found him already." But Roderigo answers, "I cannot believe that in her. She's full of most bless'd condition." And when Iago points to seeming proof, "Dids't thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? Dids't not mark that?", Roderigo refuses to believe him: "Yes, that I did; but that was but courtesy." The next scene but one (II. iii.) is the scene of Cassio's downfall. But though Iago can tempt Cassio to drink, he cannot tempt him to disbelief in Desdemona's chastity:

CAS. Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch.

IAGO. Not this hour, Lieutenant; 'tis not yet ten o' th' clock. Our gen-

eral cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona; who let us not therefore blame. He hath not yet made wanton the night with her; and she is sport for Jove.

CAS. She's a most exquisite lady.

IAGO. And, I'll warrant her, full of game.

CAS. Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate creature.

IAGO. What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation.

CAS. An inviting eye; and yet methinks right modest.

IAGO. And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?

CAS. She is indeed perfection.

IAGO. Well, happiness to their sheets! Come, Lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine; and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello.

And the very denouement of the play depends on one character's having more faith in Desdemona than in Iago. When Emilia first hears that her own husband has said that Desdemona was unfaithful, she cries, "He lies to the heart" (V. ii. 156). Thus, by having Iago always believed except in the matter of Desdemona's morality and believed in this matter only by Othello, Shakespeare is certainly using the dramatic device of [286] contrast for a purpose. And what can this purpose be but to indicate that there is something in Othello's character which leads him to believe Iago's calumny concerning his wife?

But what is this something? T. S. Eliot has made an illuminating statement concerning Othello's final great speech, "Soft you; a word or two before you go, etc." (V. ii. 338–56):

> What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is cheering himself up. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself. Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself. Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself. I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this *bovarysme,* the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare.[7]

But Eliot could have gone much further. In this last scene there is much evidence that Othello refuses to look squarely at his crime. Fate was responsible: "But, O vain boast! Who can control his fate? 'tis not so now" (264–5). Or it was the stars: "O ill-starr'd wench!" (272). Or his motive was of the best: He is "An honourable murderer. . . . For nought I did in hate, but all in honour!" (294–5). Contrast this self-exculpation with [287] the attitude of Cassio toward his fall which we discussed earlier. There is little doubt, I believe, that the Othello of the last scene is not quite so strong a character as

critics have made him out to be.[8] He is understandably human—but he is not greatly noble.

It is this, the refusal to face reality, this, the trait of self-idealization, which makes of Shakespeare's Othello a psychologically consistent characterization and which explains why he falls so quickly into Iago's trap, why he alone on Iago's instigation believes Desdemona a strumpet.

Stoll maintains that Othello's belief in Iago is not grounded in Othello's psychology but is merely Shekespeare's dramatic device. "And it is only . . . by means of a specious and unreal psychology that he is made incapable of distrusting the testimony which his nature forbids him to accept, to the point of distrusting the testimony and character of those whom both his nature and their own forbid him to discredit." [9] Accordingly, Stoll belabors those critics who have attempted to see Othello as a psychologically consistent character.

It is interesting to see the way Stoll reasons. Again and again, when in discussing characters he says that Shakespeare substitutes artifice for authentic psychology, it is always Stoll's own concept of psychology which is the criterion. It may be, indeed, that the "psychology" of the critics whom Stoll attacks is entirely false. It does not follow that the "psychology" which Stoll employs to disprove them is correct. It is possible that Shakespeare's knowledge of how certain human beings operate [288] in given situations is better than Stoll's. One is very much inclined to believe this merely on *a priori* grounds when he reads the following sentence in the midst of Stoll's rebuttal of those who have tried to read Othello's character: "Psychology, like law, is common sense, though art itself need not be." [10] No one who has any knowledge of the human heart and mind—whether he be a psychiatrist, or a psychologist, or a literary critic interested in determining to what extent art reflects life, or a spectator in the theater—will be inclined to agree with Stoll.

As a matter of fact, so irrational can human behavior be that in order to create probability the dramatist has to make his characters more consistent than people are in real life. It is a measure of Shakespeare's greatness that his probable characters are also possible characters.[11] When Shakespeare created Othello, he was merely imitating a life that produces a Rousseau or a William Blake, romantic idealists who swing from overtrust to unjust suspicion in a twinkling. Emotional polarity is one of the commonest traits of humanity. We all have a touch of paranoia in us. To the extent that we acclaim our own greatness (i.e., escape reality), to that extent do we suspect others. This

is not common sense—but it is life. And Shakespeare imitates life. And the spectator reacts to this imitation not with technical knowledge but with awareness of human nature.

Othello from the beginning is too much of a romantic idealist—in regard to himself and others. He considers human nature superior to what it actually is. He overvalues Desdemona as much as he overvalues Iago—and himself.[12] In IV. iii. Emilia discusses sex in blunt unromantic terms. And her husband tells Othello in III. iii. 138–141:

> *Who has that breast so pure*
> *But some uncleanly apprehensions*
> *Keep leets and law-days and in sessions sit*
> *With meditations lawful?*

[289] And even Desdemona in III. iv. 148, says: "Nay we must think men are not gods." But now listen to Othello when we see him and Desdemona together for the first time, when she has just pleaded to be allowed to go to Cyprus with him (I. iii. 261–79):[13]

> OTH. *Your voyces Lords: beseech you let her will,*
> *Haue a free way, I therefore beg it not*
> *To please the pallat of my appetite,*
> *Nor to comply with heate, the young affects*
> *In (me) defunct, and proper satisfaction,*
> *But to be free and bounteous of her mind,*
> *And heauen defend your good soules that you thinke*
> *I will your serious and good business scant,*
> *For she is with me;—no, when light-wing'd toyes,*
> *And feather'd Cupid foyles with wanton dulnesse,*
> *My speculatiue and actiue instruments,*
> *That my disports, corrupt and taint my businesse,*
> *Let huswiues make a skellet of my Helme,*
> *And all indigne and base aduersities,*
> *Make head against my reputation.*
> DU. *Be it, as you shall priuately determine,*
> *Either for stay or going, the affaires cry hast,*
> *And speede must answer, you must hence to night,*
> DESD. *To night my Lord?*
> DU. *This night.*
> OTH. *With all my heart.*

Note how carefully Shakespeare distinguishes between Desdemona's cry (This is their wedding night!) and Othello's almost inhuman, "With all my heart."

Just as Othello flees from facing what he is in the last act, so too

does he flee from what he is in the above speech in the first act.[14] That which makes him psychologically consistent is his [290] refusal to see himself as ordinarily human.[15] The importance of I. iii. 261–75, in which Othello disclaims sexual feelings, is that it furnishes the spectator with the first clear indication that Othello considers himself above human passions. From that time on the spectator will watch for repetition of this dangerous self-delusion and evidence that indicates it is a delusion. The spectator will contrast the Platonic exhilaration of the "O my fair warrior!" passage (II. i. 185ff.) with the sexuality of "Come, my dear love, etc." (II. iii. 3–10). The spectator will be prepared for the outbreak of passion dissolving judgment in III. iii. by Othello's outburst toward the drunken Cassio in II. iii. 204–7:

> *Now, by heaven,*
> *My blood begins my safer guides to rule;*
> *And passion, having my best judgment collied,*
> *Assays to lead the way.*

Here, for the first time, the god pose clearly dissolves. The spectator will observe self-delusion permeating the temptation scene (III. iii.) in which Othello disclaims attitudes and emotions which he immediately exhibits. The spectator will see Othello holding on to his high opinion of himself in IV. i. 39–40: "Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without [291] some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus." When Iago tells Othello that he must have patience or the former will consider him "all in all in spleen," the spectator will hear Othello say, "I will be found most cunning in my patience" (IV. i. 88–91) though word and act deny him. The spectator will see grating sensuality and the god pose held concomittantly in V. ii. 13–22. The conjunction of "I'll smell it on the tree" and self-justification is pretty ghastly. I quote Kittredge's note in his individual edition on lines 21–22: *"This sorrow's heavenly . . . love":* "My sorrow is like that which God feels when he punishes the guilty: he loves the sinner, yet punishes the sin. Cf. *Hebrews,* xii. 6: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.' Here again we see that Othello regards himself as the agent of divine justice. He strives to maintain this attitude of mind throughout the scene, but in vain." In short the spectator will not, like Stoll, accept Othello's description of himself as "one not easily jealous" in V. ii. 345, as a trustworthy remark, for it comes from one who from the first has believed himself to be what actually he is not.

Othello's romantic idealism has made him overidealize himself and Desdemona from the first. And like other romantic idealists, his overtrust speedily shifts to undertrust on the first provocation. Careful readers of the temptation scene (III. iii.) will observe how Othello cooperates with Iago, how Iago seems rather to make Othello see what corruption is within himself than to put something there which has not been there.

There is terrible truth in the reflection that if a man is wedded to his fantasy of woman as the steadfast hiding-place of his heart, the fountain whence his current flows, so that he grows frantic and blind with passion at the thought of the actual woman he has married as a creature of natural varying impulse—then he lies at the mercy of life's chances, and of his own secret fears and suspicions.[16]

Paradoxically, Othello loves Desdemona so much that it is questionable whether in human terms he loves her at all. He loves not Desdemona but his image of her. (Shelley was such another.) To Othello, his wife is not a woman but the matrix [292] of his universe.[17] And to Othello he himself is not a man but a super-being without ordinary human emotions. I never read the Othello speech above without recalling Juliet's passionate hymeneal, "Gallop apace, etc." (III. ii. 1–31). Why does Iago say of Othello in relation to Desdemona (II. iii. 345–54)?

And then for her
To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfettr'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function.

Othello, Iago is indicating here, keeps no proportion in his love. And there is no proportion in his fall. What makes of him a consistent character is a species of romantic idealism which soars, shatters, and partially recovers—which at no time, Shakespeare indicates by contrast, is ever to be taken on its own terms as modern critics tend to take it—which at no time, one can say, is completely equivalent with a nobility based on what the world is and not on what it is not.

Concerning this view, however, critics may say that I avoid the crucial descriptions of Othello by Iago:

The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are. (I. iii. 405–8)

The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband. (II. i. 297–300)

Of course both these statements are choral. The first supports my analysis. It is a cynically realistic judgment of Othello's [293] particular kind of nobility. What better definition of a romantic idealist can we find than that he is one "That thinks men honest that but seem to be so"—including himself? And the second statement is followed by lines which indicate that Othello can be made jealous "Even to madness." There is no difficulty here in reconciling how Iago sees Othello and how the spectator sees him. The trouble is that critics tend to see him as he sees himself. Do we take other self-deluded characters on their own terms—Angelo, Romeo, Lear, Timon, Hotspur?

For Othello is not the only self-deluded character in Shakespeare's plays who thinks himself more ideal than actuality permits. Consider Romeo in his relationship with Rosaline.[18] Remember what happens to Angelo in *Measure for Measure*. Of him, at the opening of the play, the Duke says (I. iii. 50–4):

Lord Angelo is precise,
Stands at guard with envy, scarce confesses
That his blood flows, or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone; hence shall we see,
If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

There is probably more likeness between Othello and Angelo than critics care to find.[19] Doesn't Othello fail in the test too? And there is one other Shakespeare character who suddenly swings from the high pinnacle of an idealism which is not based on reality to a ghastly misanthropy which, also, is not based on reality. Of Timon of Athens, Apemantus says, "The middle of humanity thou never knewst, but the extremity of both ends" (IV. iii. 300–1). How apt these words are for Othello too! That an outwardly noble character could fall because of an inner flaw, Shakespeare had indicated by means of Proteus even in the early *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. And what of the thrice-noble Macbeth? [294]

In short, it seems to me that by means of Iago's soliloquies; by means of character contrast with the brutally clear-eyed Iago, the earthy Emilia, the self-honest Cassio (who, also, be it remembered, openly admits his relationship to Bianca); by means of action contrast in the rejoinders of Roderigo, Cassio and Emilia to the proposal that Desdemona is unchaste; by means of Othello's own words in the first and second acts; by means of a carefully drawn Othello in the temptation scene who considers himself much stronger than he actually is; by means of sundry touches throughout which show Othello refusing to recognize his own passionate nature; by means of a broken Othello in the last act, who tries to hang on to his nobility by refusing to face the fact of his murder—by means of all this Shakespeare has shown us that his hero is not as strong or as good a man as he thinks he is, that the hero's flaw is his refusal to face the reality of his own nature. This Othello, who (I think) is the Othello Shakespeare intended to convey, is rather different from the modern Othello, who is always thoroughly noble—before, during, and after his downfall. The truly noble aspects of Othello I have not stressed. They are obvious. The blots on the scutcheon I have stressed, for critics have obscured them.

The Othello that Shakespeare presents is nobly tragic in the same sense in which Macbeth and Antony and Coriolanus and Lear are nobly tragic. Shakespeare's tragic protagonist is noble, but he is not altogether noble. He represents Aristotle's dictum:

> A man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment, he being one of those who enjoy great reputation and prosperity. . . . The change in the hero's fortunes must be . . . from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that. (Poetics, Chapter 13)

It is not the hero's nobility in Shakespeare's tragedies but the flaw, the sin or error that all flesh is heir to, that destroys him. It is the close interweaving of great man, mere man, and base man that makes of Othello the peculiarly powerful and mysterious figure he is. In him Shakespeare shows the possible [295] greatness, the possible baseness not only closely allied in what is after all mere man but also so causally connected that one must perforce wonder and weep.[20] [296]

NOTES

[1] *Shakespeare: A Survey* (London, 1935), pp. 219, 225.

[2] *Shakespere* (Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 35.

[3] *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press, 1933), pp. 6–55, 173–4, *passim; Shakespeare and Other Masters* (Harvard University Press, 1940), pp. 59–84, *passim;* "Source and Motive in Macbeth and Othello," *RES* 19 (1943), 25–32. The opinions of Stoll, Chambers, and Kittredge have been arbitrarily selected. Further examples of the same view can easily be found. For example, Dover Wilson says that "Iago's victim is blameless"; *The Essential Shakespeare* (New York and Cambridge, 1932), p. 120. For a most interesting consideration of Othello, far different from most, one which takes the Moor as a not totally assimilated black barbarian, see Mark Van Doren's *Shakespeare* (New York, 1939), pp. 225–37. To Van Doren, Othello "deserves his tragedy."

[4] *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York, 1942), p. 124.

[5] *Op. cit.,* pp. 45–6.

[6] E. M. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1943), pp. 53–4.

[7] "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," in *Selected Essays:* 1917–1932 (London, 1932), pp. 130–1. Though this viewpoint can be supported much more than Eliot supports it, as I indicate above, Stoll takes issue with it in *Art and Artifice,* pp. 173–4. "As I have shown elsewhere this is a self-descriptive method . . . : if taken as a bit of self-consciousness, it much troubles the noble and heroic impression." The answer to this is, simply, that apparently Shakespeare did want this impression to be troubled. One cannot possibly take Othello on his own terms. Every single thing that he says about himself in III. iii. 177 ff., "Think'st thou I'ld make a life of jealousy, etc." is immediately disproved by the way he acts in the lines immediately succeeding.

Although Stoll constantly rebukes other critics for their "psychology," in answering Eliot he does not hesitate to invent his own "psychology": "And even as dramatic psychology—this is, such as does not press and peer behind drama and poetry—the speech is finely appropriate. After such an experience and such depths of despair Othello must, in sheer reaction and relapse, think a little well of himself. It is one of the glories of Shakespeare that . . . he recognizes the limits of human nature. . . ."

Then does Stoll agree with Eliot? The issue seems to be that the former sees the hero as thoroughly noble, the latter as imperfectly noble. However, Eliot also indicates the tension between these two viewpoints going on at one and the same time in the spectator, for Eliot himself is a spectator.

[8] The final Othello is not a pretty sight to watch. Consider his whimpering (243–5 and 270–1), his refusal to be by himself (257–8), his uncontrolled screaming (277–82). I cannot see how Shucking can write of Othello that "Shakespeare's intention . . . was to create a hero who, for all his weakness in the matter of jealousy, never falls so low as to lose his dignity"; "The Baroque Character of the Elizabethan Tragic Hero," *Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy* (1938), p. 27. Critics state—but do no more than state—that Othello at the end is a better man than he has been before; see A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London and New York, 1906), p. 198; R. W. Chambers, *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (London and Toronto, 1939), pp. 261, 303; E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (London, 1938), pp. 17, 21. G. Wilson Knight, "The Othello Music," in *The Wheel of Fire* (Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 130, does not claim growth but does claim that during the last scene "Othello is a nobly tragic figure."

[9] *Othello* (University of Minnesota Press, 1915), p. 33; quoted with a few changes in *Art and Artifice,* p. 16.

[10] *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare,* p. 17.

[11] The underlying premise of the present paper is that expressed by W. W. Lawrence, "Artifice must always be sustained by a due proportion of nature, of psychological consistency." "Hamlet's Sea Voyage," *PMLA* 59 (1944), 69.

[12] See Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 217–24, 245, 332–4. This is probably the best psychological discussion of Othello to be found. But Miss Bodkin is interested in much broader matters than I am.

[13] I quote from the first quarto because folio omits Desdemona's question and the Duke's reply in 279. Modern texts differ, some following Q, some F.

[14] Of this speech, Theodore Spencer (*op. cit.,* pp. 127–8) writes: "His love for Desdemona is in keeping with such a character; entirely unlike the love of Troilus for Cressida, it has no sensuality in it. When he asks to be allowed to take Desdemona to Cyprus with him, he explicitly describes—in the terms of Elizabethan psychology—the exalted quality of his devotion: (Spencer quotes the speech.) Like Horatio, Othello appears to all the world as a man who is not passion's slave. His higher faculties, his 'speculative and offic'd instruments,' are apparently in complete control."

Is Othello, then, displaying sensuality when in Cyprus, in II. ii. 8–10, he says to Desdemona:

> Come, my dear love.
> The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;
> That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you.

Is Desdemona displaying "sensuality" when she cries, "Tonight, my lord?" Othello may play the noble stoic concerning marriage in I. iii. But he talks like a normal man concerning marriage in II. iii. And unless Shakespeare was extraordinarily careless, the two speeches were

meant to contrast. In the first Othello indicates that he is above men; in the second, that he is a man. He is a good man in the second, an extraordinary man (if honest) in the first. But since the second contradicts the first, Othello is neither extraordinary nor honest. Certainly an audience feels if it does not see something wrong in the first. One function of Iago's filth in I. i. is certainly to indicate to the audience the sexual aspect of marriage.

[15] Compare Othello's opinion of himself with Henry the Fifth's (*HV*, IV. i. 104–12):

> *For, though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man, as I am. The violet smells to him as it does to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.*

[16] Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns*, p. 222.

[17] "My life upon her faith" (I. iii. 295). Iago's opinion (II. iii. 348–54), quoted above. "Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul, etc." (III. iii. 90–2). "If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!" (III. iii. 278). "O, now for ever Farewell the tranquil mind! etc." (III. iii. 347–57). The most notable expression of the total dependence of Othello on his image of Desdemona is in IV. ii. 47–64, "Had it pleas'd heaven, etc." But these are explicit statements. His whole bearing toward Desdemona, especially in II. i. the arrival in Cyprus scene, implies this view of her.

[18] Objective analysis of this relationship is supplied by Friar Laurence in II. iii. 64–82.

[19] With Othello's denial and Iago's admission of human frailty cited above, cf. Isabella to Angelo (II. ii. 136–41):

> Go to your bosom;
> Knock there, and ask you heart what it doth know
> That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
> A natural guiltiness such as is his,
> Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
> Against my brother's life.

[20] Since writing the above, I have read an important little book, Allardyce Nicoll's *Studies in Shakespeare* (Hogarth Lectures No. 3, London, 1931). Since students of Shakespeare tend to distrust—and rightly—any character interpretation that differs sharply from the traditional view, I am happy to record that Professor Nicoll (though he uses a different approach, less inductive and comparative than impressionistic) has come to the same conclusion as this paper presents—that Othello is a self-deceiving romantic idealist. Though he merely outlines rather than fills in in detail (as this paper attempts), yet our interpretations even to the use sometimes of the same passages coincide remarkably. But I do not think that Professor Nicoll sees Othello as in tension between conflicting inward forces: he tends to strip him bluntly of all nobility. I suppose I should say that when it comes to Desdemona and Iago, I accept the traditional interpretations rather than Nicoll's.

Justice and Love in *Othello*

WINIFRED M. T. NOWOTTNY

It is a commonplace of criticism of *Othello* that the Moor, entering in Act V to the murder of Desdemona, sees himself as a minister of Justice. It is apparent that this act is full of references to judgment and of images drawn from it. Yet it is usually assumed that this is but an additional turn of the screw, a means of throwing an even more lurid light on Othello's crime against the innocent Desdemona. It is the purpose of this article to put the case that the insistence on justice in Act V of *Othello* is the culmination to which the drama as a whole is designed to lead, and moreover that a fuller perception of the excellence of the dramatic economy will follow upon the recognition that Shakespeare intends in this play an evaluation of justice in its relation to love.

In *Othello* jealousy is treated as a state in which man experiences the opposition of two kinds of belief—belief in "evidence" and belief in the person one loves—and the opposition of the value of justice (as he conceives it) to the value of love. What is tragic in *Othello* derives from these oppositions. The character of Othello serves but to bring them on; jealousy is the stage on which they stand forth. For in jealousy of this nature and magnitude, justice and love, which in other situations may be conceived of as parallels, meet. It is therefore no accident that Othello is full of allusions to justice and of metaphors drawn from it, since, in the jealousy of Othello, the value of justice and the value of love become openly contestant and reveal their essential incompatibility. The trend of the play becomes clear when one considers the difference between two judgments Othello makes, the one on Cassio:

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Cassio, I love thee;
But never more be officer of mine,

the other on Desdemona: "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee." The judgment on Cassio can be made, though reluctantly, yet without personal conflict, by subscribing to the idea that justice and love are compatible values; but the judgment on Desdemona is preceded by the personal experience of the conflict of those values, and represents a decision between them.

It is possible to argue that the contention of love and justice begins, in this play, with Brabantio's attempt to bring love under the law, from which attempt it follows that the quality of Othello's and Desdemona's love is declared in a kind of trial scene. Brabantio's [330] accusation and the subsequent inquiry might, it is true, be dismissed as being no more than a means of providing for the necessary exposition of what has gone before. Shakespeare's intentions in this matter are debatable: it could be that the excellence of the device for expository purposes was the whole of his reason for adopting it, or it could be that he saw this device as being "fit not only to advance the action of a special plot and to exhibit certain traits in particular characters, but also to prompt in an audience's mind a special vein of semiconscious comment or a special mood of reverie about certain general ideas." [1] But whatever we make of Brabantio, we cannot deny significance to Cassio's part in illuminating Othello's attitude to justice and love, since Shakespeare uses him, in III. iv. to point a clear contrast between Othello's attitude to these two values, and Desdemona's. In this scene Cassio asks Desdemona to intercede for the rescinding of Othello's judgment upon him, and weighs his chances of reinstatement in Othello's love:

If my offence be of such mortal kind
That nor my service past, nor present sorrows,
Nor purposed merit in futurity,
Can ransom me into his love again. . . .

In contrast to this reference to Othello's hierarchy of values, in which justice stands higher than love, there follows Desdemona's reflection on the "unkindness" of Othello and then her immediate penetration of her own absurdity in submitting love to the processes of judgment and thereby constituting herself simultaneously plaintiff, witness, suborner, and judge:

Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was, unhandsome warrior as I am,
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborn'd the witness,
And he's indicted falsely.

The full development of this theme does not come until Act V, but there Othello and Desdemona play exactly the same roles, he as Justice, she as Love:

EMIL. *O, who hath done this deed?*
DES. *Nobody; I myself. Farewell:*
Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell! . . .
OTH. *She's, like a liar, gone to burning hell:*
'Twas I that kill'd her.
EMIL. *O, the more angel she,*
And you the blacker devil! [331]

This theme, made explicit in Act V, is implicit in all that leads to Act V. In particular, it shapes the treatment of Iago and Othello in Act III. For the very setting of the stage for conflict, the creation of the situation which brings it about (Iago's temptation of Othello) is done in terms of the differing processes pertaining to judgment and love, and emphasizes the difference between the kind of belief relevant to the forming of judgments and the other kind of belief characteristic of love. Shakespeare chooses to make Iago's success depend upon the fatal interaction between two things: the weakness of testimony as such (which is Iago's strength), and the strength of love (which, fitted into the context of Iago, becomes its weakness). The first dialogue of the temptation falls into two parts, separated by Othello's long speech on jealousy (III. iii. 176–92).[2] In the first part Iago exploits the trickiness of testimony; in the second part he exploits the generosity of love; what is fatal to Othello is the conjunction of the two. It should be stressed that Shakespeare has taken this way of bringing about Othello's mistrust because it allows him to manifest in dramatic terms the pitfalls of reasoning about love and of admitting testimony against it. He shows the process of false testimony succeeding and specifically refers to the reasons why it is impossible to assess it. He posits an Iago entrenched in false opinion; he refers particularly to the impossibility of discriminating between true and false by considering the witness's manner; he shows how the very negatives of testimony can be converted into positives (as Iago, having

no proof, makes capital of a feigned reluctance to speak); further, he points to the element of construction inseparable from testimony (when Iago protests that he "imperfectly conceits" the significance of his "scattering and unsure observance" and in so doing is able to divulge exactly what is in his mind). In short, Iago's testimony is strong in proportion as all testimony is weak; his tricks are possible because of the trickiness of testimony itself. Further, in Othello's speech of protest, Shakespeare adverts to the irony at the root of all these ironies: it is useless for Othello to say "I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove," since infidelity does not necessarily produce evidence of itself and fidelity cannot be put to the proof.

Othello's speech over, the dialogue enters its second phase, in which Iago makes capital of the generosity of love. The characteristic irony of this part of the dialogue is prepared for by Iago's words,

> *I would not have your free and noble nature,*
> *Out of self-bounty, be abused; look to 't.* [332]

It is precisely this self-bounty of love (both Desdemona's and Othello's) which he now proceeds to abuse. Desdemona's love had been strong enough to be its own conscience, and is therefore open to another verdict in another context:

> IAGO. *She did deceive her father, marrying you;*
> *And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,*
> *She loved them most.*
> OTH. *And so she did.*

Again, Iago's well-timed "My lord, I see you're moved," makes Othello answer, in loyalty to Desdemona, "I do not think but Desdemona's honest"; he cannot, immediately upon that, challenge Iago for proof. Now, significantly, Othello takes the lead, because it is now the finest part of self-bounty (Iago is not fitted to understand it) which plays him wholly into Iago's hands. Desdemona's love had transcended all obstacles in a magnificent departure from ordinary "nature." It had baffled Brabantio by its unreasonableness. Othello in turn, in self-deprecation, makes the mistake of bringing it to the bar of reason:

> *And yet, how nature erring from itself—*

He does not complete the thought, but its completion is apparent: nature, having left its course, might no doubt lose that fine exaltation and subside to its course again; it would be quite reasonable to sup-

pose that Desdemona had ceased to love. Here for a moment Iago loses track of Othello and takes this to refer to "foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural," but hastily covers up his mistake and achieves an approximation, though a base one, to Othello's thought:

> *Her will, recoiling to her better judgement,*
> *May . . .*
> *happily repent.*

Othello dismisses him, but the mischief is done, as his soliloquy shows.

The way in which Shakespeare has directed the dialogue to illuminate the weaknesses of testimony shows that this scene is much more than a device to bring on Othello's conflict. Obviously it was within Shakespeare's power to have manufactured evidence more credible than Iago's bare tale; in *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado about Nothing* he did manufacture it. Here he chooses to make Iago succeed by reason of the gulf between likelihood and love and by reason of the tragic conjunction set up when the nature and processes of love become involved with the utterly different nature and processes of judgment. At this point the audience may, already, feel (to use the words of Shakespeare in another play) that it [333]

> *aches*
> *To know, when two authorities are up,*
> *Neither supreme, how soon confusion*
> *May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take*
> *The one by the other.*[3]

It is here, however, that Shakespeare parts company with some of his critics (those who debate whether sufficient reason is made out for Othello's believing Iago). It is not my purpose to join in the critical battle over this ground. It need only be observed, in so far as some critics have laboured the irrationality of Othello, that Shakespeare seems to have taken it for granted that jealousy is irrational (to judge from Emilia's comment that men "are not ever jealous for the cause"); on the other hand, in so far as some critics have laboured the inevitability of Othello's believing Iago (as Coleridge did) it seems relevant to observe that such critics seem concerned to defend Othello from the charge of ignoble irrationality and that this defence too is foreign to Shakespeare's presentation of the case. Shakespeare's own view may be deduced from the way in which he deliberately draws attention, at this very point in the play, to the fact that immunity

from jealousy has as little to do with reason as jealousy itself. For when Desdemona enters, as Othello comes to the end of his soliloquy, Iago's edifice trembles:

> *Desdemona comes:*
> *If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!*
> *I'll not believe 't.*

Immunity from jealousy would lie in the continuance of this simple act of faith. Othello cannot maintain this faith, but if he could, it would still be as nonrational as the jealousy from whose stigma some critics have been anxious to defend him. Shakespeare at this point deliberately forces upon the audience the question, In what strength could Othello reject Iago? The answer would seem to be, By an affirmation of faith which is beyond reason, by the act of choosing to believe in Desdemona. Shakespeare's point is that love is beyond reason. Desdemona's love for Othello has been made "unreasonable" in a way which permits discussion of it in the drama, as when Brabantio tries to bring it to the bar of reason and to punishment by the law, but Othello's race and strangeness (which constitute Brabantio's case) are after all only dramatic heightenings of a simple truism which it is Shakespeare's peculiar excellence to have thought remarkable enough for repeated dramatization: the truism that love, any love, is a miracle. [334] Being a daily miracle, it is not often seen as miraculous; to arrive at that valuation of it costs something, as in *King Lear;* to fail to arrive at it costs more, as in *Othello.* With love, reason and justice have ultimately nothing to do.

There is another play of Shakespeare's in which this idea again takes the dramatic form of jealousy and judgment. Leontes is jealous. He brings his wife to judgment. In the trial scene she describes her helplessness in terms wholly applicable to the situation in *Othello:*

> *Since what I am to say must be but that*
> *Which contradicts my accusation and*
> *The testimony on my part no other*
> *But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me*
> *To say "not guilty": mine integrity*
> *Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it,*
> *Be so received. . . .*
> *You, my lord, best know,*
> *Who least will seem to do so. . . .*

Marital fidelity is the case par excellence where the only protection of the accused is that intuitive belief in her integrity which should

have precluded accusation, an intuitive belief which is irrelevant to justice, as justice to it. To inquire what Shakespeare takes to be the nature of this intuitive belief will therefore be of importance to the understanding of *Othello.*

The best commentary on Othello's "I'll not believe 't" is to be found in *Troilus and Cressida.* There Troilus actually sees Cressida's perfidy. He admits the fact:

> ULYSS. *All's done, my lord.*
> TRO. *It is.*

But he finds none the less that his belief in Cressida does not change:

> *. . . if I tell how these two did co-act,*
> *Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?*
> *Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,*
> *An esperance so obstinately strong,*
> *That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,*
> *As if those organs had deceptious functions,*
> *Created only to calumniate. . . .* (V. ii. 118–24)

And again:

> *O madness of discourse,*
> *That cause sets up with and against itself!*
> *Bi-fold authority! where reason can revolt*
> *Without perdition, and loss assume all reason*
> *Without revolt: this is, and is not, Cressid.* [335]
> *Within my soul there doth conduce a fight*
> *Of this strange nature that a thing inseparate*
> *Divides more wider than the sky and earth. . . .*[4]
> (V. ii. 142–9)

Between the assent of reason to evidence, and the consent of love to a change of belief about its object, there is a great gulf fixed, and to cross it is to experience the terrible passage from one organization of personality to another. Sonnet 138 suggests that it may even seem preferable to descend into the gulf and dwell there:

> *When my love swears that she is made of truth*
> *I do believe her, though I know she lies. . . .*

Othello, incapable of this conscious complexity, wishes that at least he might have been deceived:

> *What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?*
> *I saw 't not, thought it not, it harm'd not me:*

I slept the next night well, was free and merry;
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips. . . .
(III. iii. 338–41)

Troilus is aware of the act of choice inherent in ceasing to believe and of the agony that goes with it; Othello, though he understands nothing of this, cannot avoid experiencing it. This is shown in III. iii. 444ff., where Othello, convinced that Iago's tale is true, acts in gesture the emotional choice:

Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago;
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone.

But it is not. It is impossible to make that choice without a reorientation of personality, and therefore the gesture is followed by the terrible images in which he calls upon himself for a reversal in the depth of his nature and the dethroning of the might and dominion of love:

Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught. . . .

The poetry, markedly, does not describe this change as taking place of itself; it shows Othello commanding it to take place. For in truth the change of belief which Othello thinks inseparable from his acceptance of Iago's story is not inseparable—it is an emotional *non sequitur*. Othello does not, like Troilus, recognize and define the separateness, but he feels and acts according to its laws: he has to *command* the [336] emotional "effect" to accompany its "cause." The paradox illustrates the truth of Troilus' discovery that there is in the soul a "bi-fold authority"—on the one hand, reason, and on the other the naked will to believe by which the categories of "reasonable" and "unreasonable" are altogether transcended. Othello is not the man to admit the possibility of a "madness of discourse, That cause sets up with and against itself," but this does not alter the fact that his experience, like that of Troilus, involves the conflict between two images of the woman he loves.

Shakespeare has already shown, earlier in the same scene, that what Othello thinks of as uncertainty of mind is in reality an intolerable emotional tension which demands violent expression:

I think my wife be honest and think she is not;
I think that thou art just and think thou art not.

I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied!

Here we have, first, Othello's attempt to interpret his conflict as uncertainty of mind, and his desire to end it (as he thinks he could) by proof. This counterfeit of the problem is followed immediately by the real problem, the two images of Desdemona: "fresh as Dian's visage"; "begrimed and black." From this tension of incompatibles springs the impulse to violence. With "Would I were satisfied!" he reverts to the illusion that proof will quiet that volcano whose raging we have glimpsed. The very form of this speech, enclosing within two patent rationalizations a reality of experience betrayed directly in imagery, shows that the inner conflict between two modes of belief about Desdemona is the heart of the matter and that Othello, in interpreting it to himself as uncertainty of mind, is simply providing the conflict with a surface rationalization. And it is the urgency of the conflict and of the resultant impulse to end it by violent action that explains Othello's snatching at Iago's lies about Cassio and the handkerchief: by so doing, he can turn the force of his emotions into the current of revenge. It is significant that the image in which he expresses his determination to be revenged (the image of the Pontic sea) contains the promise of release: he promises himself a revenge as "capable and wide" as the Propontic and the Hellespont.

It is one of the finest strokes in the construction of the play that Shakespeare puts the vow of revenge before the test of the handkerchief. By so doing, he makes clear in the action what he has already [337] suggested in the poetry: that the idea of revenge, though it seems to Othello to follow from what he now thinks of Desdemona and offers him the illusion of release from the conflict of his emotions, is not in fact Othello's whole bent. If he could unify himself by revenge, that would be one way out, but he cannot; the test of the handkerchief is a desperate attempt to unify himself in the opposite way—by having Desdemona prove that what Iago has said is false. Othello's description to Desdemona of the mystic nature of the handkerchief—

A sibyl . . .
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk;

And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful
Conserved of maidens' hearts—

is not an irrelevance; he is in reality asking Desdemona to restore to him the sacredness of love.[5] After the failure of this attempt, he is not seen until Act IV, and Act IV concentrates on showing the dreadful interim within Othello when the disjunction of his personality rages for expression and cannot find the means.

It is in Act IV that the nature of the action affords indisputable proof that Shakespeare has in this play a unified design which utterly transcends that concern for immediate theatrical effect which some critics would have us impute to him, for in this act "theatrical effect" is least satisfactory as an explanation of Shakespeare's choice of episodes. Othello falls in a fit; he strikes Desdemona in public; he goes to her as to a prostitute. If these things are chosen only for their immediate effect, the choice is extraordinary, for Act IV is, in itself, hardly to be borne. Its effect is accurately described by the words of De Broglie: "Le spectateur contemple ce tableau, non point avec cette curiosité inquiète que passe tour à tour de la crainte à l'espoir, mais . . . avec quelque chose de cette angoisse inexprimable qui s'empare de nous lorsque, dans une cour de justice, nous assistons aux vains efforts de malheureux entraînés vers une condamnation fatale et indubitable." [6] This is not an effect which Shakespeare often risked. The other tragedies increase in illumination as the end approaches; even *Macbeth,* nearest to *Othello* in the increasing denigration of the hero, looks forward in Act IV to a better future—the line of Banquo passes before our eyes, and as the act closes, [338]

Macbeth
Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments.

In *Othello* Act IV is well nigh insupportable. Is not the reason that it is the inescapable outcome of Act III and, more important, the indispensable preparation for Act V, in that the intolerableness of Act IV is the means by which the audience is made to experience, like Othello himself, the necessity for release? The perfection of Shakespeare's art here consists in the economy by which he brings about this participation of the audience in the hero's tragedy: the violence in the action, which creates tension in the audience, is motivated within Othello himself by his tension, a tension which is the result

of his failure in Act III to unify himself either by the vow of revenge or by making Desdemona restore to him his undesecrated love.

When Act IV opens, it immediately becomes clear that Othello's decision to revenge has in no way touched his real problem. He has even forgotten how he decided: when Iago reminds him of the handkerchief, he says,

> *O! it comes o'er my memory,*
> *As doth the raven o'er the infected house,*
> *Boding to all.*

But though indecision is over, tension is at its greatest; Othello now has the experience as it really is—the tension between two Desdemonas, between two Othellos. (Othello's image in IV. i. 192–4, "my heart is turned to stone, I strike it and it hurts my hand" is the equivalent, in the sphere of the emotions, of Troilus' "madness of discourse, That cause sets up with and against itself"; with Othello as with Troilus "a thing inseparate Divides more wider than the sky and earth.") The episodes of Act IV manifest and communicate this tension by the dreadful spectacle of Othello's attempts to escape from it. The pitch rises as his ways of seeking relief draw, horribly, ever nearer to Desdemona and to the deepest intimacies of love. The falling in a fit is a temporary way of not bearing the tension. That, shocking as it is, affects only himself. The next way is the striking of Desdemona. His striking her in public (for in their private interview there is nothing of this) is a symbolic act: a calling the world's attention to the intolerableness of what he suffers by the intolerableness of what he does. The treating Emilia as a brothel-keeper is an expression of the division in him at its deepest level: to go to his wife as to a prostitute is to try to act out what the situation means to him. Already Othello is driven to symbolize his conflict in act—to seek actions that will express the [339] impossible. But none of these things will serve. Othello is not seen full face again until, in Act V, he finds the perfect symbolic act: to kill, not in hate but in love.

The scene of the murder of Desdemona is a visible demonstration of the laws inherent in the process that led up to it. This is a drama of an error of judgment, the error being in the application of judgment to love. It is not, however, surprising, that the relation of Act V to all that goes before has been imperfectly seen, for the perception of that relation depends upon our recognizing the terrible propositions

about human justice which Shakespeare laid down for himself to work by: as, that justice, however it is conceived of, cannot be executed in love; that love and justice differ in their natures, their processes, and their conclusions; that justice, though ideally conceived of as an expiating sacrifice or as the only cure for a wound in the fitness of things, may be, in its human origin and motivation, indistinguishable from man's need to find redress for what he cannot bear to find in human nature; that, finally, the man who accepts justice as the supreme value in life will, if he be wholly consistent, at last execute himself. I believe all these propositions to be implicit in the play. If their starkness should cause us to deny them or simply not to see that such questions arise, then Act V cannot be seen as the logical outcome of Acts I–IV. The fact that Othello perpetrates injustice in no way weakens the significance of Act V, for the play turns upon the conflict between justice and love, not upon the nature of justice itself. No aspect of Othello's experience of that conflict would have been different if Desdemona had in fact been false (though if she had been false, Othello's experience would have been incommunicable to an audience; the audience's participation in his conflict depends upon its having, as he has, two images of her—his image, and the truth).

In Act V, the significance is so entirely fused with the poetry and the action that it is only by faithful attention to these that we can rightly estimate what Shakespeare was about; this is sufficient reason for pondering every phase of the action, and all the meaning that the poetry carries, even at the risk of being thought to consider too closely or of being accused of attempting to explain poetry and genius.

First, then, let us consider the opening soliloquy of Act V, scene ii: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. . . ." It is to our great loss that we let these words pass as some oracular utterance not susceptible of commentary. We may begin by inquiring what "cause" meant in Elizabethan English. It meant, first, the accusation or charge against someone, as in *King Lear* (IV. vi. 111–13), "What was the cause? [340] Adultery? . . . die for adultery! No." Secondly, in an even more specialized sense, it meant the matter about which a person went to law, or the case of one party in a suit. In a third sense, it meant the end in view or the object for which a deed is done. Or again, in a very pregnant sense, it meant good, proper, and adequate ground for action (as Cassio uses the word in "I never gave you cause").

Which of these meanings does Shakespeare intend? He intends the first, the charge against Desdemona; he also intends the second, Othello's case against her; he intends the fourth, in that Othello thinks himself to have good, proper, and adequate ground for action; and indeed he also intends the third, the end to which the action shall be done. The end to which the murder shall be done is, simply, release from the whole agony. In the phrase itself, as in the action it refers to, Othello's complex attitude is unified: Desdemona is guilty and he has a case against her, but what he is about to do is to him an action just in every way, and what he is about to do has a purpose, the making of an atoning sacrifice which shall make all well. The word unites the personal, the social, and the religious aspects of justice, just as the killing is to answer every need of his nature that he recognizes: the need for punishment, for abstract justice, for the restoration of the ideal image of Desdemona by an atoning sacrifice, and, one might add, a need deeper than all these, the need to possess her again—for murder is now the only act of possession open to him.

Knowing how much "cause" means, we can now grasp the whole phrase, "It is the cause." Said thrice, it evidently has depth under depth of meaning for Othello; two ways, at least, in which the phrase has meaning, are apparent. First, it may be taken as the answer to the unspoken question, "What is it that makes me do this?"—"It is the cause." Secondly, the phrase may be interpreted as an utterance of recognition: "it" (the act of killing) "is" (is the same thing as) "the cause" (the whole state of affairs between us). In other words, Othello has found the act which corresponds to all he feels, though what he feels is a complex of opposites, for the act is symbolic; to describe that act he finds the word which means all that the act means, and the syntax which enables him to describe the act as being the same thing as all those opposites he feels, and therefore their expression, and therefore his release. The killing itself is in this sense symbolic: it is an act which stands for all the warring emotions pent up in Othello. These emotions are now fused in a calm of pure concentration on the symbolic act, an act which is the only possible way for Othello to express at once all that Desdemona means and all that he means. He has the [341] exaltation of having struck a perfect equipoise. But what he is about to do would cease to be an all-embracing symbol if he defined its relevance to any one aspects of the problem: if he were to put the act into defining words, they would break up the

symbol, for if the act is vengeance, it cannot be justice or atonement, and if it is any of these, it is not passion; and if it is not all of these, it is not release. Hence Othello's refusal to define:

> *Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!—*
> *It is the cause.*

Because of all that "cause" means to Othello, its real emotional meaning is "solution," and because the solution is simply, and as absolute symbol, the act of killing, there is no transition between those words, "It is the cause" and the next, "Yet I'll not shed her blood." It is as though he had said, "The solution is to kill, yet I'll not shed her blood." Then, the moment he looks at Desdemona—at her skin as "smooth as monumental alabaster"—he is forced to give himself a reason why he should destroy her: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men." As soon as one reason is given, the symbol begins to dissolve, and to stop the dissolution of his symbol, he must cease to see anything but that—and so, "Put out the light, and then put out the light." This again is an act of a purely symbolic nature; again he identified in one action two entities objectively different but emotionally the same: Desdemona, and the light he extinguishes in order not to see her; indeed, it is as though the parallelism of the two acts constituted their logic. The blackness of the act is matched by the blackness in which alone it can be performed. Othello's state is one in which pattern and relationship take the place of reasoning. As in the parallel, "Put out the light, and then put out the light," so in the whole situation: that an act fits is the whole reason for its being done. To kill in love; to revenge by justice; to kill the guilty Desdemona for the honour of the innocent Desdemona, or to sacrifice the innocent Desdemona to atone for her guilt; to torture her because she has tortured him and to torture himself in torturing her—in all this it is the pattern that constitutes the logic, for it is the pattern of his feelings. It is moreover only through pattern and symbol (so tranced is his state) that he can consider the finality of his act:

> *If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,*
> *I can again thy former light restore,*
> *Should I repent me: but once put out the light. . . .*
>
> *When I have pluck'd the rose,*
> *I cannot give it vital growth again. . . .* [342]

As if this achievement of expressing emotion through form were not sufficient, Shakespeare has all the while developed, within the tranced patterns of Othello's utterances, the great impersonal pattern of Justice and Love. It is in the growing intensity of Othello's realization of his continuing love, counterpointed by the growing compulsiveness of the sanctions of justice which he must allege to outdo it, that Shakespeare expresses the major conflict of the drama. Faced by the fact that love continues, even in this extremity, Othello is driven to urge higher and higher the claims of that justice which shall destroy it. Justice has already been called in under its aspect of safeguard of society: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men." Love persists. Justice is then called in as an abstract ideal. Love, still, can almost persuade her to break her sword, and hints that the threatened act of destruction is at heart the act of possession, of plucking the rose. Justice, in a final terrifying aggrandisement, claims the ultimate possible sanction, the sanction of love: ". . . this sorrow's heavenly; It strikes where it doth love." The process is complete. Justice overrides love by presenting itself as love. In this parallel ascent, where the claims of justice rise with the claims of love, Shakespeare has manifested their tragic contestation, and through the form of the poetry he has shown how the act of killing is related at one level to the tension of opposites in Othello and at a deeper level to the fundamental and eternal opposition of justice and love.

Desdemona wakes. So must Othello. He had thought to strike in heavenly sorrow; he strikes with "Down, strumpet!" From the height of his intention to the depth of the execution the descent is inevitable: at no point in the dialogue could Desdemona's pleas for life produce effects other than it does, for the issue of love against justice is settled now; there must inevitably rise up, within Othello's temple of sacrificial justice, the asseverating wrathful self, accusation and self-vindication streaming from its lips:

> *O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,*
> *And makest me call what I intend to do*
> *A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.*

It is indeed only the executioner who fully knows the resistance of the sacrificial victim. In human justice as it is commonly ordered the executioner need not question the motive of the judge, nor the judge question his own. With Desdemona, Othello is judge and executioner;

he is also plaintiff, and the only possible witness for the defence. In him justice confounds itself by the concentration of all its person in [343] one, and in being so confounded by unity, throws into relief the indivisible and unconfounded unity of love.

There remains the revelation of the truth. Justice now comes into its own. In *Measure for Measure,* justice pointed to its impartiality:

> *When I, that censure him, do so offend,*
> *Let mine own judgement pattern out my death. . . .*
> (II. i. 29–30)

Othello has killed Desdemona for betraying their love; he kills himself for the same reason. He surveys his life, judges it, passes sentence, and executes it, as long ago he did in Aleppo:

> *Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk*
> *Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,*
> *I took by the throat the circumcised dog*
> *And smote him, thus.*

Othello's death is perfectly consistent with his life. From first to last, he is the judge. [344]

NOTES

[1] C. E. Montague, "The Literary Play," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association,* II, 83.

[2] References are to the Globe Shakespeare.

[3] *Coriolanus,* III. i. 108–12.

[4] For a fuller treatment of the importance of this scene, see Charles Williams, *The English Poetic Mind* (Oxford, 1932), 58–61.

[5] I am happy to find independent corroboration of this suggestion in R. B. Heilman's essay, "The Lear World" in *English Institute Essays:* 1948 (New York, 1949), 49: "Symbolically . . . [Othello] is in anguish crying for the restoration of the myth of love, for its magic—non-rational, transcendent, mysterious. . . ."

[6] Quoted in the New Variorum *Othello* (2nd ed.), 452.

Othello: The Unheroic Tragic Hero

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

The problem of character presented by Othello's collapse before Iago's machinations in 3.3 is handled in three main ways. According to one view, the problem is insoluble: Othello believes Iago only "by virtue of the convention of the calumniator credited." Among the analysts of character, the older tradition is that Othello is the victim of Iago and remains pretty much the "noble Moor" throughout; he is guilty only of being too innocent or foolish or simple or trusting or of losing his usual self-control. According to the other main approach through character, Othello is not the "noble Moor" at all but has serious defects of character which cause his downfall—defects such as habitual flight from reality and as pride. Resultant protests against the deidealizing of Othello may in part be due to the fact that, after the long dominance of the Bradley view of Othello, the discoverers of his flaws tend to take his virtues for granted—courage, desire to do and be right, normal inclination to be open, the impalpable elements summarized as "charm," relative freedom from pettiness and duplicity. But these virtues may coexist with serious defects. I began my study holding the orthodox view of Othello's "nobility" but found the impression gradually modified by repeated readings of the lines. There is something in Othello's own rhetoric, I suspect, which can simultaneously support [137] conflicting impressions of his personality. The sweep, the color, the resonance, the spontaneity, the frequent exoticism of the images—all this magniloquence suggests largeness and freedom of spirit, and it is at first easy to forget that

From *Magic in the Web: Action and Language in Othello* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), pp. 137–168. Reprinted by permission of the author and the University of Kentucky Press.

self-deception, limitedness of feeling, and egotism may also inhabit this verbal expansiveness. If there is this ambiguity in the style, then the style is a fitting instrument for a complexity of character that we may subconsciously resist because of the obvious elements that have nourished the long tradition of calling Othello "simple." There is no master term for Othello—"nobility" or "simplicity" or "passionateness under control" or "pride" or "romantic idealism." In following his role one needs a number of different terms, as different facets of his personality come to the fore, or as one is attempting to name a moral quality or a secret impulse. In trying to trace a kind of weakness that leads to the quest for what, though neither satisfied with the term nor able to hit on an equally compact alternative, I call "positional assurance," I also use such terms as "puritanism," "stoicism," "self-love," "self-deception," and so on. Whatever the cost in uniformity, some such plurality of terms cannot be avoided, I believe, without imposing schematic readings.

The arguments that Othello's yielding to Iago in 3.3 is explicable in terms of his character usually turn on such points as these: Iago's irresistible technique and his long reputation for honesty; Othello's fine but simple "extrovert" nature, suited for action but not for perception and reflection; his deeply passionate nature, at best held under precarious control; his submerged sexuality, likely under stress to break out in violence; his unfamiliarity with Venetian ways; a "racial" self-consciousness, inferiority, and perhaps savagery. It is possible that Othello's characteristic quest for assurance of position may reflect in part an ethnic anxiety; once or twice he speaks in terms that may imply an alien's special doubt. Yet such passages are few and incidental; the ideas do not come up again and again as they would do if they were naggingly present in his mind. Though Iago takes some trouble to work on Othello [138] as an outsider and to arouse the suspicions of the foreigner, Othello's passions simply do not mature according to this mold. He thinks of himself as the victim of women generally ("these delicate creatures . . . / . . . their appetites"—3.3.269–270), as the victim of marriage in high life (273ff.), as the "horned man" (4.1.63), rather than, let us say, as the "despised Moor." (Cf. Shylock's awareness of being a Jew.) Shakespeare strives, not for a particularist vulnerability and rancor, but for the human essence, and Othello's scope is lost sight of if we can understand him only by racial psychology. *Othello* is not a treatise on mixed marriages, but a drama about Everyman, with the modifications necessary

to individualize him. Othello's Moorishness, if it is anything more than a neutral heritage from Cinthio, is less a psychological or moral factor than a symbol of characteristic human problems currently denoted by such overly familiar terms as "insecurity" and "rejection." Moorishness, in this sense, is one of the ills that flesh is heir to.

The breakdown of Othello from Act 3 on is a collapse of certain props of assurance—the assurance of being loved and the assurance of position—upon which his personality rests and which, as we see long before then, he needs after the manner of a habit. When he murders Desdemona he no longer has the assurance of being loved, but, under the pressure of an alert instinct, he has provided himself with a new "positional assurance." [139] This experience appears to me to be representative rather than idiosyncratic.

. . . . .

CAUSE, SACRIFICE, MURDER

The murder scene requires and fulfills all the careful characterization of Othello that has gone before, for this exactly determines the tone and movement of the scene. It is the high point of the themes of violence and justice. It is another in a series of legal actions; like that in Act 1, it is concerned with a charge of sexual misconduct. In Act 1 there were a defendant, a corroborating witness, a judge, and a plaintiff given to recklessness but not incapable of reason and patience. Here we have only the defendant and the plaintiff—a plaintiff given to self-deception and passion. [152]

. . . . .

After Desdemona awakes, the dialogue repeatedly draws upon [153] court procedure. She pleads, "guiltiness I know not" (39) and is warned by Othello: "Take heed of perjury" (51). But the irony is that Othello undermines his own role:

> *Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;*
> *For to deny each article with oath*
> *Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception*
> *That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.* (53–56)

The court has made up its mind in advance and sentenced her. The judge loses his composure, cites the circumstantial evidence that Iago

gave him, and abuses the prisoner: "By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand! / O perjur'd woman!" (62–63). If Shakespeare had dramatized evil only by such travestying of justice, he would have been very effective. But he has gone further.

Othello is not content with the role of judge. Note these lines:

Have you pray'd tonight, Desdemon?

If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconcil'd as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.

DES. *Then heaven*
Have mercy on me!
OTH. *Amen, with all my heart!*
Think on thy sins.
Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin.
DES. *Then Lord have mercy on me!*
OTH. *I say amen.*
(25, 26–28, 33–34, 40, 53, 57)

Though some of these lines might be spoken by a Christian judge, they belong rather to the Christian priest, especially the priest in the role of confessor. This, then, is Othello's climactic means of placing himself on a pinnacle of assurance and of blinding himself to the true nature of what he does there. Though he has already inclined to assume the role of priest, only now has he invested it with a brief air of dignity, [154] which Shakespeare uses skillfully to dramatize the horror of Othello's conduct: to the coolness, the prayerfulness, the almost gentle calmness of the priest is added the frankness of the killer: "I would not kill thy unprepared spirit. / No, heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul" (31–32). Repeatedly Othello talks of "killing" her—his voice quiet and controlled—at the same time that he urges her to save her soul. The shock is that of a murder by rite, of an exotic depravity in which the selfless spiritual concern and the wholly selfish violence are confounded. The priest as killer is a remarkable dramatic conception: an ultimate violence is expressed by doing violence to all our preconceptions. This strategy is used doubly: the priestly role is worked out alongside the judicial role, so that we also have the judge as killer. But then the judge, we recall, is also the plaintiff and the prosecutor: and now he becomes also the executioner —as well as the confessor bent on the spiritual salvation of the crimi-

nal. In this merging of incompatible roles is the apex of Othello's self-deception, and here at last we can see that Othello was so easily deceived, so easily taken in by appearances and the false physician and the honesty game, because he had such great talent, and even a need, for self-deception. As we look further, we see that even his actions as confessor are equivocal: for if Desdemona confesses what he is convinced she must confess, she will give him the final assurance of his rectitude as judge and executioner. The revenger assumes the priest to hide the revenge; but even then he is not content but must convert the priestly function into an instrument of self-justification. [155]

. . . . .

THE END OF THE CASE

Othello holds court until the end of the play: the judge (the judge-prosecutor-priest-executioner) has to find his own crime (in the tragic pattern created by Sophocles). The court which had heard only one witness must in time, simply by being a court—and this is one virtue of Othello's ritualizing impulse to be judicial—hear other witnesses. The late criminal returns from death to charge, "O, falsely, falsely murder'd!" (117), turning against Othello one of his favorite words of accusation, and to plead again, "A guiltless death I die" (122). Othello's assurance is never dependable; the court is promptly thrown on the defensive, reviles the victim (128ff.) to questioning Emilia, asserts, on the [160] penalty of being "damn'd," that it "did proceed upon just grounds" (138), takes up the "honest Iago" defense of the sole witness and of itself (148, 154), and then, authority fading before the indignation of Emilia, falls into a slump while Emilia calls for help, cross-examines Iago, and blasts his testimony (169ff.). Othello confesses the death of Desdemona and then patiently, concessively (203, 210), almost wearily resumes the defense of the court action (200ff., 210ff.). This part of Act 5 is arranged with especial skill, since the movement comes inevitably from the characters and leads to maximum dramatic effect. There is an alternating rhythm of passion in Othello and Emilia: the first violence of his defense is overborne by her shock and incredulity, and when these have almost exhausted her, he is ready to present an orderly and relatively unimpassioned summary of the evidence. And it is just this complete judicial review

of the case which leads at last to the hero's self-recognition in error (discovery of his "mistake" if not complete discovery of himself) that distinguishes tragedy from the brute disaster that impinges only on the beholders. For Othello's defense of the court must name the handkerchief, and this arouses Emilia to a new frenzy in which she tells the true story of the handkerchief (219 ff.). This is the ironic climax of the court metaphor: in the end the handkerchief does have evidential value—but the reverse of what Othello had supposed. The circumstantial evidence which he had admitted and relied on and which once apparently revealed Desdemona to Othello, now partly reveals Othello to himself.

Othello's first impulse, after his new vision of truth, is to execute summary justice on Iago, whom he attacks twice, the first time acting as a self-appointed deputy for an apparently tardy or ineffectual divine justice: "Are there no stones in heaven . . . ?" (234). Here is something again of Othello's inclination to spectacle, to the large mouth-filling stage effect; and the impulse to blame the outer agency of evil and thus avert recognition of inner responsiveness to it. But he does come to the judging of himself, according to his abilities; thus [161] the spirit of justice persists; human order is served by an implicit extension of the very ritual of the court that earlier permitted Othello to gloss over the role of revenge. The instinct for ritualization, though it may be directed toward self-deception, is related to the instinct for justice which includes self-judgment. The principle of the court is brought into play, and the individual is subordinated to it, regaining community. Iago, on the other hand, in the end simply closes up, hardens up in silence and resistance, hugs himself to himself in a shut-off, private world that, though it may break under the cruder instruments of retributive justice, is impermeable to spirit (cf. Othello's "free and open nature"—1.3.405).

It is possible to view the bowing before justice sentimentally, as we know from the turn which drama aspiring to seriousness took in the eighteenth century. It is, indeed, one of the more difficult feats to achieve a submission to justice—an acknowledgement of one's own errors—which is not also a prostration of dignity; in this the dramatist wrestles with the paradox of the attainment of self in the eclipse of self, and he becomes committed to cardinal problems of spirit. The greatness of Othello is not generally of that dimension. Shakespeare approaches the personality rather in terms of a not wholly overt conflict between the sense of justice and a vague appetite for eluding

or circumventing its implications: he gives us a series of self-judgments whose rigor is modified by men's partiality to other objectives. [162]

. . . . .

Othello appears before the court of his own conscience, is sentenced to death by himself, and executed by himself. He takes on the same multiplicity of roles that had led to gross injustice in his dealing with Desdemona; his incompetence in the earlier case he purges by his sentencing himself now; justice is served finally by the death of the judge.

Perhaps we should say only that "overt justice" is served. For the foreground action of the court (judicial self-judgment) is modified by a background action of the feelings (personal self-judgment) that admits a charity which is excluded from the sentencing itself. The total self-judgment is colored by elements of personality that we have discerned in other parts of the play. In other words, we have again a provocatively ambiguous court scene, but one which tellingly reverses the terms of the trial of Desdemona: there the private emotion was primary but was qualified by the form of justice; here the act of justice is primary but is qualified by the habits of private feeling. Two elements are tightly interwoven, and we would lose sight of one or the other if we judged Othello to be only the upright executor of justice or, conversely, only the self-regarding loser sunk in self-pity and self-justification.

He speaks accusingly of his failure to kill Iago and keeps his own weapon (5.2.243, 270–271). But here, too, is something of his love for executive despatch: the man who disposed quickly and neatly of the cases of Cassio and Desdemona has been inefficient in dealing with Iago, and on top of that he is hemmed in by Gratiano. He is able to check the comfort of warrior's memories—"O vain boast!" (264) but falls into the sheer defensiveness of "Who can control his fate?" (265), as if he were not actively concerned in the disaster. But, in another attempt to face the moral issue, he turns to Desdemona's body: "at compt," he says, "This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven, / And fiends will snatch at it" (273–275). Yet even here he in some way slights the present by leaping from past to future: he less defines the quality of his [163] act than anticipates its consequences. In fact, he is a little disposed to revel in the hellish aftermath: "Whip me, . . . / . . . / Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur! / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" (277–

280). Here is the tendency to violence, even to spectacle; the summoning of such penalties has a histrionic side. Indeed, Othello, the tough man of war, the stoic in body, equates punishment with physical torment, which, as he portrayed himself in Act 1, is just what he can best endure. "Facing the consequences," when these mean anguish of the flesh, may be a lesser task than facing one's spiritual state. When Lodovico asks Othello, in effect, to explain himself, Othello replies: "An honourable murderer, if you will; / For naught did I in hate, but all in honour" (294–295). Othello does say "murderer," and it is possible that combining "honourable" with "murderer" may be a bitter irony at his own expense. But the second line, as well as Othello's general incapacity for the oblique, makes it very likely that he means, not "nothing but a murderer, trying to look honorable," but "though, alas, a murderer, still an honorable man." "Naught . . . in hate" again displays self-deception: Othello does not know how close hate is to love, and he has forgot the intensity of his passion to destroy. In "all in honour" there is his old quest of assurance of position. Honor is a surrogate for the justice that has gone utterly wrong: in lieu of the lost "cause" it implies a code that ennobles the private lust for punitive action. Yet by "honor" he means less the "active honor" that implies obligation of self to others than the "passive honor" that asserts the obligation of others to oneself and one's accompanying privilege of imposing penalties on those who fail.

Amid spasmodic attacks on Iago, Othello approaches humility at only one moment: when he asks Cassio's pardon for plotting his death (300). His terms of abuse for Iago are more frequent and more severe than the terms of judgment for himself. On hearing the final details of the handkerchief [164] story, Othello cries "O fool! fool! fool!" (323). His epithet reminds him only of the least of his errors. He somehow conveys the impression that his big mistake was not so much murder and revenge as it was depriving himself of Desdemona; he less repudiates the violence than deplores the silly mistakes which wiped out a very nice girl. To understand the incompleteness of the self-judgment we have only to recall the stern self-appraisal of Roderigo: "O, villain that I am!" (5.1.29). The impression of a not wholly disciplined partiality persists even in his death speech, that ingenuous apologia in which Othello bids the onlookers, "Speak of me as I am" (342), and then, with no more self-awareness than before, labors to present an "I am" which will at the last minute give all the assurance possible to a man about to be executed and

all the help possible to those willing to "extenuate" his history. Othello's death sentence does represent a self-judgment or at least an invocation of justice as a public act; but while it is a penalty, it is also an act of desperation, a flight from bereavement. The guilt is never specified, but the extenuating circumstances are. The judge and prosecutor becomes, in the end, his own defense attorney, accepting the ultimate legal penalty but throwing himself morally on the mercy of the court of public opinion. He has "done the state some service, and they know't" (339); what the observers of these events must report is "unlucky deeds" (341), as though no will had been involved; he was "wrought, / Perplex'd in the extreme" (345–346) —words which do not report that there was no effort at the delay that might have untangled the maze of difficulties; he "threw a pearl away" —a note of pitiable loss rather than of misconduct; his eyes "Drop tears" (350) rapidly—the marks of a grief and tenderness that appeal for sympathy and that might err but not overtly do evil. "Set you down this" he goes on (351), as if he (who in Act 1 thought in terms of "cue" and "prompter") and they were collaborating on a work of dramatic art. As in Act 1, Othello is conscious of his role and of his audience, [165] particularly now when he sharply focuses all eyes and ears on himself and his last words and theatrically punctuates his death statement with the death blow. His final stroke in the picture of himself is this:

> *And say besides that in Aleppo once,*
> *Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk*
> *Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,*
> *I took by th' throat the circumcised dog*
> *And smote him—thus* (352–356)

In a last effort at security (self-esteem and popularity) he invites the Venetians to remember him as a hero of both state and religion. Ironically, his analogy—in which, as earlier (2.3.170), he plays for the stock response of turkophobia—also has the effect of making him a malignant dog. They may be a self-betrayal or, as I suggested earlier, a symbolic effort at recovery by self-definition. But the effect of the moral judgment of self is obscured by the showmanship. Othello's last court plays for at least a murmur of applause.

Othello is the least heroic of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. The need for justification, for a constant reconstruction of himself in acceptable terms, falls short of the achieved selfhood which can plunge with

pride into great errors and face up with humility to what has been done. All passion spent, Othello obscures his vision by trying to keep his virtues in focus. The Moor, the warrior, the survivor of exotic adventures, the romantic historian of self, is oddly affiliated with the middle-class hero, and in his kind of awareness we detect a prevision of later domestic drama.

It is these aspects of Othello's personality that are lost sight of when his ending is pictured as a rather glorious affair. His very defensiveness and sentiment and sense of loss and of good intention not quite explicably gone awry win an affection which a stern facing of spiritual reality might not. In Othello, the hero is—a rare thing—very close to Everyman in his latent capacity for violence and in all his ordinary self-protective [166] devices. This is the underlying, though unidentified, reason why it is easy to "feel with" him. It is easy to feel with him, also, because he ends things with a beguiling masterfulness; he commands attention, without a disaffectingly conspicuous ostentation: his very use of reckless power matches a secret impulse. With his uninhibitedness, he provides the observer with a release for the unredeemed, though normally controlled, egotism that can aspire secretly both to self-justification and to easy authority over the eyes and hearts of others. Mature men resist the gratifications of these impulses when they come separately; if they are offered together, the double beguilement requires a sharper-eyed resistance. But Othello offers not only these satisfactions that may slide in unperceived; he is, besides, carrying out at least a partial justice. If he is not facing himself in the full truth of his deeds, he is unmistakably sentencing himself to the ultimate penalty—as a pusillanimous person could not do. And finally, to increase his claim upon our feelings, there come into our memories, beyond that seductive union of spectacle and self-punishment before our eyes, impressions of other qualities of his —of the zealous soldier, the loyal servant of the state, the candid and uncalculating man who, unlike Iago, desired the good. This is the complex, and not easily resistible, recipe for the "noble Moor." And a portion of that nobility, of the largeness of the public figure, is there. So are the failures, the self-centeredness, the blindness, the spiritual immaturity that we have described. Though it is easy to call Othello "simple," the characterization is far from simple, and it exacts of us the same double awareness as the trait of his which we may call aspiration—an impulse which may lead to nobility or to flight from

actuality, or to something of both at once. In all his major actions there is a comparable ambiguity.

In trying to win approval, from others and himself, Othello includes in his summation a one-line definition of himself which has been remembered better than any other part of [167] his apologia—as "one that lov'd not wisely, but too well" (344). Was his vice really an excess of a virtue? Or should he have said "not wisely, nor enough"? One can guess that the constant quest of assurance might mean less a free giving of self than a taking for self. [168]

Othello on the Stage

Edmund Kean as Othello

ARTHUR COLBY SPRAGUE

Yet his Othello was ever the same. Nothing about it was fortuitous, nothing left unprepared. Lewes had heard on good [77] authority that when Kean was to appear on an unfamiliar stage he would carefully count "the number of steps he had to take before reaching a certain spot, or before uttering a certain word." Such variations as occurred from performance to performance were never of the actor's seeking.

> The voice on some nights would be more irresistably touching in "But, oh! the pity of it, Iago!"—or more musically forlorn in "Othello's occupation's gone"—or more terrible in "Blood, Iago; blood, blood!" but always the accent and rhythm were unchanged.[1]

And of the greatest of the speeches, Vandenhoff writes that it "ran on the same tones and semitones, had the same rests and breaks, the same *forte* and *piano,* the same *crescendo* and *diminuendo,* night after night, as if he spoke it from a musical score." [2]

Those who describe Kean's Othello dwell on single scenes, speeches, phrases; they tell us little about the impersonation as a whole. Kemble, indeed, is said to have remarked that "if the justness of the conception had been but equal to the brilliancy of the execution it would have been perfect; but the whole thing was a mistake; the fact being *that Othello was a slow man.*" [3] The American tragedian Thomas Abthorpe Cooper was of much the same opinion.[4] Even Hazlitt thought the character misconceived: "Othello was tall; but that is nothing: he was black, but that is nothing. But he was not fierce, and that is everything." Only at the end does the Moor give way to rage and despair, whereas Kean was "all passion . . . too uniformly on

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the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack." [5] Another playgoer was appalled by what he saw. Leveson Gower writes in one of his letters: [78]

> The Play—I never saw such acting. I am not sure whether I like it; admire it I must—it is nature. Should tragedy be quite so natural? There wants a spice of Dignity; the passions would be disgusting were they represented so exact. . . . Kean gives me the idea of Buonaparte in a furor. I was frightened, alarmed; I cannot account for what I felt. I wished to be away, and saw those eyes all night, and hear "D—n her! d—n her!" still—it was too horrible.[6]

Kean made little of the first two acts, saving himself, ever for the third. Now and again, some spectator, responding more sensitively than his fellows, might be suddenly impressed. "There is an indescribable *gusto* in [Kean's] voice," a poet wrote, "by which we feel that the utterer is thinking of the past and future while speaking of the instant." And when this Othello came to,

> *Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,*

it was as if "his throat had commanded where swords were as thick as reeds. From eternal risk, he speaks as though his body were unassailable." [7] Thus Keats. But although Finlay, in Ireland, noticed Kean's reading of the same line, it was without pleasure. To him, the actor's "pauses in the short dialogue" were

> too frequent and too long. . . .
>
> Keep up your bright swords,
> For the dew will rust them.
>
> Between these two short sentences he makes a long pause; and endeavours to throw *great effect* into the last one . . . he constructs his clap-trap on the word *swords.*

And the remark to Brabantio immediately following—

> *Good Signior, you shall more command with years*
> *Than with your weapons*—[79]

was spoken mistakenly with "anger and reproof." [8]

John Kemble made, as we have seen, occasional excursions, or swoopings, into the colloquial. But they were infrequent and attracted little attention even in his own time. Kean's readiness to discard the pomps of tragic speech, to become "easy, conversational, *unstagey,*" was the delight of audiences. Othello's

> *Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it*
> *Without a prompter,*

spoken simply, yet pointedly, with "a wonderful mixture of sarcasm and courtesy . . . always brought down the house." [9] A similar though less legitimate touch came in the next scene. Othello's explanation to the Venetian senators was beyond Kean. "He had little power of elocution unless when sustained by a strong emotion; and this long simple narrative was the kind of speech he could not manage at all. He gabbled over it," eager to reach the close:

This only is the witchcraft I have us'd,
Here comes the lady. Let her witness it.

"His delivery of this 'point' always startled the audience into applause by its incisive tone and its abrupt transition." He made it "the climax of a withering sarcasm—attacking the word 'witchcraft' with high and sudden emphasis, and dropping into an almost disrespectful colloquialism as the lady appeared." As Lewes observed, "nothing could be more out of keeping with the Shakespearian character." [10]

Act Two is through most of it Iago's act, not Othello's. One passage alone, the exquisite greeting of Desdemona in Cyprus, stood out in Kean's performance. Even there it was objected that he spoke, "not in a tone of proud, rapturous, and affecting exultation, but in the sepulchral accent, and [80] solemn utterance, of a penitent grateful for his salvation; or a shipwrecked mariner returning thanks for his deliverance." [11] To other ears, however, the note of rapture was clearly audible, with overtones of pathos as well. The words

if it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy,

seeming, as this Othello pronounced them, "almost to forbode the misery that awaits him." [12]

Those who knew Kean in the part waited for the third act. The intensity, the grandeur of the performance began with Iago's direct attack upon the Moor. "The whole of the latter part of the third act," Hazlitt wrote, "was a masterpiece of profound pathos and exquisite conception"; [13] and Lewes was satisfied that "the lion-like fury, the deep and haggard pathos, the forlorn sense of desolation, alternating with gusts of stormy cries for vengeance," were represented by Kean "with incomparable effect." [14] Certain lines and single phrases he made peculiarly his own. Othello's farewell to the glory of war is one of these. "Not a jot, not a jot" is another, and

I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips,

and "O, blood, Iago, blood!"

The objection that Kean was jealous too soon, occurred to Finlay. But no one else seems to have felt this, and Finlay himself admits that "in all other respects" the "picture of *jealousy*" was superb—"one of the finest exhibitions that we have seen or could imagine." [15] The *Theatrical Inquisitor,* for February 1817, praises Kean for the "peculiar tenderness" of his "prithee no more" and "I will deny thee nothing!" in the scene with Desdemona.[16] Then, [81]

when Iago instilled the first precepts of jealousy, by describing the monster, . . . he started at the first whisper of this insinuation, stung by alarm, and bewildered with fury, as the whole emotion spread through his shaking frame, and tinged every look, every word, with unspeakable horror.

From other accounts, it would seem that this "sudden spasmodic contortion of the body, as if he had been abruptly stabbed," was upon hearing Iago's "O beware, my lord, of jealousy." [17]

"I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits," says Iago; and Othello, "not a jot, not a jot." Kean spoke the words with a pretence of composure, or even carelessness.[18] But anguish appeared in his action, tone, and look. He "clung to the side-scene," closing his eyes as if to keep back tears.[19] In Hazlitt's words, it was "perfectly heart-rending." [20] A few speeches more, and the first application of torture is over. At "Leave me, Iago," Kean turned away and walked toward the back of the stage, "raising his hands, and then bringing them down upon his head with clasped fingers." Dana comments on the grace and "imposing grandeur in his figure," as he stood thus with his back to the audience.[21] And Lewes seems to have had the same moment in mind when he wrote, years later:

When shall we see again that lion-like power and lion-like grace—that dreadful culmination of wrath, alternating with bursts of agony—that Oriental and yet most natural gesture, which even in its *naturalness* preserved a grand ideal propriety (for example, when his joined uplifted hands, the palms being upwards, were lowered upon his head, as if to keep his poor brain from bursting)—that exquisitely touching pathos, and that lurid flame of vengeance, flashing from his eye? [22] [82]

It was upon Othello's return, however, that Kean reached his greatest heights. The entrance was with an "abrupt and wandering step," as if he were

swallowed up in the fearful bewilderings of a heavy heart. The sound of *Iago's* voice broke his meditation. He suddenly raised his eye, and pronounced the words, "avaunt, begone," with the haughty and resentful glance of a man accustomed to authority. . . . After gazing till the first

burst of passion recoiled upon himself, he dropped his arms, and relapsed insensibly into a gesture finely indicative of utter exhaustion.[23]

The next speech began calmly. But the thought of Cassio's kisses roused him to desperation. He paused before "kisses," as if he could scarcely bring himself to pronounce the word ("Cassio's—kisses—on her lips"), which he spoke with an "emphatical expression of disgust." [24] The climax of the performance was near:

O, now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content! . . .

Kean's rendering of the great lines called forth tribute after tribute, the writers exhausting themselves to find comparisons by which to describe it. It was "as pathetic as a lover's farewell to his mistress," Henry Crabb Robinson wrote, "I could hardly keep from crying; it was pure feeling." [25] Hazlitt found that it "struck on the heart like the swelling notes of some divine music, like the sound of years of departed happiness." [26] Leigh Hunt's description, written not long before the actor's death, is one of the best.

His repeated fare-wells, with the division of the syllables strongly marked,—

> Fare-well the tranquil mind! fare-well content!
> Fare-well the plumed troop, &C. [83]

were spoken in long, lingering tones, like the sound of a parting knell. The whole passage would have formed an admirable study for a young actor, in showing him the beauty of sacrificing verbal painting to a pervading sentiment. . . . Mr. Kean gave no vulgar importance to "the plumed troop" and the "big wars", as commonplace actors do; because the melancholy overcomes all: it merges the particular images into one mass of regret.[27]

One even more impressive tribute remains to be quoted. It comes, this time, not from a critic but from a fellow player—Kean's rival on that momentous night in 1817.

Once and only once, [writes Edwin Booth,] my father gave me a glimpse of his reminiscences; on that occasion he, who seldom spoke of actors or the theatre, told me that in his opinion no mortal man could equal Kean in the rendering of *Othello's* despair and rage; and that above all, his not very melodious voice in many passages, notably that ending with "Farewell, *Othello's* occupation's gone," sounded like the moan of ocean or the soughing of wind through cedars. His peculiar lingering on the letter "I" often marred his delivery; but here, in the "Farewell", the tones of cathedral chimes were not more mournful.[28]

Obeying what was already a tradition of long persistence, Othello now seized Iago by the throat—

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore!

Kean's rage here "was nothing less than convulsion": it was "a frantic assault"; and "the feebleness which followed" gave evidence "of the intensty of suffering that had consumed him." [29] A last great moment was "O, blood, Iago, blood!" [30] Keats wrote of the exclamation that it was "direful and slaughterous to the deepest degree; the very words appear stained and gory. His nature hangs over them, making a [84] prophetic repast." [31] Here again was the Othello whose eyes haunted Leveson Gower for hours after!

We hear much less of Kean in the last two acts, the fourth, indeed, being shockingly cut in representations of his time. Leigh Hunt, seeing him in 1831, regretted the deterioration of his acting at one point.

Had it pleased heaven
To try me with afflictions, &C.

had once, he wrote, been "the finest passage in the finest performance on the stage. We remember his standing apart, when he delivered it, alone, absorbed, as if he was left desolate, and then his voice rose with calm misery as though he had tears in his eyes, and so he continued for several lines." [32]

Kean's "quietness" in the last scenes was noticed by one critic, who found it "beautifully consistent" with his manner of speaking the "farewell" in Act III. It was as if passion had " 'raved itself to rest'; even when Othello learns too late that his wife was guiltless, it scarcely moves him." [33] And Othello's repeated "Fool! fool!" this actor spoke not rantingly but "quickly, and almost inarticulately, and with a half smile of wonder." [34] There was praise, finally, for the death scene.[35] Kean, we are told, always related the manner of death to its cause. In this instance, he realized that "death by a *heart* wound is *instantaneous,*" and "literally dies standing; it is the dead body only of Othello that falls, heavily and at once; there is no *rebound,* which speaks of vitality and of living muscles. It is the dull weight of clay seeking its kindred earth." [36]

Attempts were sometimes made by those who extolled Kean to find in him the legitimate successor to Garrick—or at any rate the restorer of the Garrick tradition. Elderly [85] persons, like Jack Bannister, who remembered Roscius were eagerly consulted as to resemblances

between them—both little men with magnificent eyes! [37] Kemble certainly was unlike either. But against him, as I have tried to show, Kean had every advantage. Romanticism, long kept from the stage, was bound to find its players, even if this meant setting up Eliza O'Neill as a rival to the aging Siddons. Kean himself, the vagabond and rebel, fired the imagination. His art seemed purely inspired. "Other actors," wrote Keats, "are continually thinking of their sum-total effect throughout a play. Kean delivers himself up to the instant feeling, without a shadow of a thought about anything else." [38] It was a mistaken assumption, but a quite natural one.

Kean's great moments moved men to tears. They were adventurous, laden with poetic suggestion. Better such moments, the age decided, than the monotonous accuracy of the other school. Lewes sums up in a few words the case for Kean, the romantic actor: "The greatest artist is he who is greatest in the highest reaches of his art. . . . It is not by his faults, but by his excellences, that we measure a great man." [39] [86]

NOTES

[1] *On Actors and the Art of Acting,* 18.

[2] *Leaves from an Actor's Note-Book,* 21 (cf. Walsh, *Didactics,* I, 154).

[3] Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence,* ed. Lord John Russell, Boston, 1853–1856, VI, 70 (Murray was Moore's informant).

[4] James E. Murdoch, *The Stage,* Philadelphia, 1880, pp. 143, 144.

[5] *Dramatic Essays,* 77. Kean's Othello "appeared more like a Mahratta chief than a native of Africa" (Finlay, *Miscellanies,* 244).

[6] Lord Granville Leveson Gower, *Private Correspondence 1781 to 1821,* ed. Castalia Countess Granville, London, 1916, I, 457. The letter, which seems to have escaped the vigilance of Kean's biographers, is dated "May 6, 1804" (sc. 1814). Byron, going with Hobhouse and Tom Moore to see Kean as Othello, found that he "threw a sort of Levant fury of expression into his actions and face" (Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life,* London, 1909–1911, I, 125).

[7] *Works,* ed. Buxton Forman, III, 4 (from *The Champion,* December 21, 1817). For Kean's power of transporting a sympathetic spectator beyond the present, see also Mrs. Trench, *Remains,* London, 1862, p. 283.

[8] *Miscellanies,* 242, 243.

[9] Vandenhoff, *Leaves from an Actor's Note-Book,* 22.

[10] *On Actors,* 16, 17. Isaac Harby found Kean's reading of the speech "sketchy, hurried and ineffective" (*Miscellaneous Works,* Charleston, 1829, p. 274). On the other hand, Frances Williams Wynn was struck

by "the burst of tenderness" in "And I *loved* her that she did pity them" (*Diaries of a Lady of Quality,* ed. Abraham Hayward, London, 1864, p. 112).

[11] *Theatrical Inquisitor,* May 1814.

[12] *New Monthly Magazine,* February 1, 1816 (see also Harby, *Miscellaneous Works,* 274; and Forster, in *Dramatic Essays by John Forster and George Henry Lewes* ed. Archer and Lowe, p. 14).

That Kean was not deficient in dignity is maintained by a writer in *Blackwood's,* for March and April 1818, who cites as an instance the dismissal of Cassio, later in this act (see also the quotation from Fitzgerald, page 71 above).

[13] *Dramatic Essays,* 17.

[14] *On Actors,* 17.

[15] *Miscellanies,* 239, 240. He insists that Kean expressed jealousy when Desdemona first pleaded for Cassio, that is, before Othello was left alone with Iago!

[16] Fanny Kemble, in her unexpected tribute to Kean, speaks of "the unutterable tenderness of his reply to Desdemona's entreaties for Cassio" (*Journal,* Philadelphia, 1835, I, 147 note).

[17] "Reminiscences of Edmund Kean," *Theatrical Journal,* February 19, 1868; see also Durang, "The Philadelphia Stage," from *The Sunday Dispatch* (1855), chap. IXX. In *The New Monthly Magazine,* February 1, 1816, attention is called to "the simple exclamation, 'And so she did.' " As this "bursts from him, . . . the tumult of thoughts that has been passing across his mind during the long pause that preceded it is manifest."

[18] *Theatrical Inquisitor,* February 1817; *New Monthly Magazine,* July 1, 1816.

[19] Mary Cowden-Clarke, *My Long Life,* New York, 1896, p. 82; *New Monthly Magazine,* July 1, 1816.

[20] *Dramatic Essays,* 78.

[21] *The Idle Man,* 45, 46.

[22] *On Actors,* 133.

[23] *The Times,* May 14, 1814.

[24] *The Times,* February 21, 1817; *New Monthly Magazine,* July 1, 1816.

[25] *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence,* ed. Thomas Sadler, New York, 1877, I, 276 (May 19, 1814).

[26] *Dramatic Essays,* 78 (cf. 17, 37).

[27] *Dramatic Essays,* 207, 208. "His voice," Leigh Hunt wrote, "occasionally uttered little tones of endearment, his head shook, and his visage quivered" (*The Examiner,* October 4, 1818, quoted in Leigh Hunt's *Dramatic Criticism,* ed. Houtchens, 201). Kean's face, as he spoke the lines, and his "clasped hands" are mentioned by Isaac Harby as contributing to the effect, which was "irresistible" (*Miscellaneous Works,* 275).

[28] *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States,* ed. Matthews and Hutton, III, 7. For Kean's "II" and "rr", see also Thomas R. Gould, *The Tragedian,* New York, 1868, p. 28.

[29] *Times,* February 21, 1817; *Theatrical Inquisitor,* X (1817), 141.

[30] This I take to have been his reading. It is that of the Kemble and Oxberry editions.

[31] *Works,* ed. Buxton Forman, III, 4.

[32] *Dramatic Essays,* 207 (cf. *The Examiner,* October 4, 1818, quoted in Leigh Hunt's *Dramatic Criticism,* ed. Houtchens, 201, 202); see also *Diaries of a Lady of Quality,* 113. W. G. in *The Literary Gazette,* March 1, 1817, took exception to the *"sarcastic* tone of lightness" which Kean gave to the word "married" in the same scene:

> "I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
> That married with Othello."

[33] *New Monthly Magazine,* February 1, 1816.

[34] *Blackwood's* March 1818 (of the performance with Booth).

[35] "His stabbing himself was a masterpiece" (Lord Broughton, *Reccollections,* I, 125).

[36] "An Actor," in *The Tatler,* September 23, 1831 (Hunt, *Dramatic Essays,* 229).

[37] On Garrick and Kean, see *The Farington Diary,* ed. James Greig, VII, 237, 238, 241; VIII, 69, 74; also, Thomas Dibdin, *Reminiscences,* London, 1827, II, 31, 32; Leslie, *Autobiographical Reminiscences,* 98 (cf. Adolphus, *Bannister,* II, 230, 231); Sheridan Knowles, *Lectures on Oratory,* London, 1873, p. 134 b.; Martin, "An Eye-Witness of John Kemble," *The Nineteenth Century,* February, 1880.

[38] *Works,* ed. Buxton Forman, III, 5 (cf. George Darley, in C. C. Abbott, *Life and Letters of George Darley,* London, 1928, p. 22). Kean himself once remarked that "he always felt his part when acting with a pretty woman, and then only" (Lord Broughton, *Recollections,* I, 173). For Kean and the Romantic Writers, see D. J. Rulfs in *Modern Language Quarterly,* December 1950.

[39] *On Actors,* 13.

Edwin Booth as Iago

ARTHUR COLBY SPRAGUE

The first performance, with Booth as Othello, Irving as Iago, was on Monday, May 2 [1881]. Then, a week later, Irving was the Moor and Booth his ancient.[1] Ellen Terry played Desdemona; Terriss, Cassio; and Pinero, Roderigo.

One hears of the "tumultuous applause" bestowed upon the performers by a great audience; of the many artists and others who were present; of the "Boothians," "Irvingites," and "Terryites." The popular parts of the theatre were "densely crowded." [2] G. R. Foss, the actor, tells of being at the pit door from one o'clock in the afternoon (pit seats were to be had for two shillings). "There were no queues in those days; it was a football scrum, all hard shoving and the devil take the hindmost. But it was well worth it." [3] Thinking over the play afterwards, a critic could take comfort in the thought

> that our much abused and derided theatre has really produced something to which, without vanity, we may point as a proof that this nineteenth century of ours, despite the jibes of *Punch,* is not wholly unworthy to enjoy the heritage of Shakespeare; [124]

and, albeit "with the utmost trepidation," he "would hazard the doubt whether, even in the happiest days of the poetic drama . . . this noble play can ever have been *as a whole* much more satisfactorily presented." [4] It may be added that Irvin's Iago—an unconventional characterization abounding in brilliant detail—was very generally preferred to Booth's Othello.

Public interest showed no sign of waning with the exchange of rôles. Booth's Iago was warmly praised. *The Times* actually liked it better than Irving's—"less startling," indeed, "less spirited," but as

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a whole "more artistic." [5] Sir Theodore Martin finds this Venetian "much more likely than Mr. Irvin's to impress those around him with the belief of his 'exceeding honesty.' " The evil in the character flashed out upon occasion "with tenfold force by contrast with the careless ease of his general bearing. Every word told without having undue stress laid upon it." The "soliloquies were those of a man really thinking aloud." [6]

Mowbray Morris, in an essay first published in *Macmillan's Magazine,* describes the two Iagos with at least an appearance of fairness to both:

> The American Iago, clear, cool and precise, admirably thought out, never deviating a hair's-breadth from the preconceived plan, design and execution marching hand in hand with ordered step from the first scene to the last; a performance of marvellous balance and regularity, polished to the very fingernail. The Englishman's startling, picturesque, irregular, brilliant sometimes, sometimes less brilliant than bizarre, but always fresh and suggestive, always bearing that peculiar stamp of personality which has so often saved the actor in his sorest straits.

It was marred, in the writer's opinion, by a single fault—and this fault, one so far from being regarded as such that [125] it was often counted a virtue—*"a perpetual striving after something new."* [7]

That there was development in Booth's conception of the rôle is asserted by a writer in whom I have great confidence, Henry Austin Clapp. Booth (he says) had fitted his performance" to his physical limitations," making Iago "a light, comfortable villain" and bringing out his human qualities. "Later he darkened the hues of his conception, and steadily increased its force . . . and profundity." Malice gave place to a satanic malevolence. There was now an "absolute self-consistency," an "unfailing relation of every point and particular . . . to the total scheme." [8]

Many, however, of the distinguishing traits of Booth's earlier Iago, as we know them from the detailed description by Lucia Calhoun in the sixties, lasted on unchanged. There was plausibility. This villain indulged in

> no stage winks and grimaces. Save in his soliloquies he makes no confessions to himself. If Othello had suddenly turned upon him, at any moment in their interview, he would have seen only the grave, sympathetic, respectful, troubled face that was composed for him to see.[9]

So Dutton Cook, writing of Booth at the Princess's, could "remember no *Iago* at once so natural and plausible, so intellectual and so terrible"; [10] and Towse agrees that he was "entirely plausible. . . . His

most pernicious lies to Othello—concerning Cassio's dream and the handkerchief, for instance—he administered in the most deceptive form, that of an involuntary confidence." [11]

Booth himself is quotable on this same matter of plausibility. In one of the memorable notes which he contributed to the Furness Variorum *Othello* in 1885, Iago is advised: [126]

> Do not smile, or sneer, or glower,—try to impress even *the audience* with your sincerity. 'Tis better, however, always to ignore the audience; if you can forget that you are a "shew" you will be natural. The more sincere your manner, the more devilish your deceit. I think the "light comedian" should play the villain's part, not the "heavy man"; I mean the Shakespearian villains. Iago should appear to be what all but the audience believe he is. Even when alone, there is little need to remove the mask entirely. Shakespeare spares you that trouble.[12]

Unpretentious as the words are, they are yet full of meaning. In another note, returning to the idea of Iago's seeming sincerity, he warns:

> Don't *act* the villain, don't *look* it or *speak* it (by scowling and growling, I mean), but *think* it all the time. Be genial, sometimes jovial, always gentlemanly. Quick in motion as in thought; lithe and sinuous as a snake. A certain bluffness (which my temperament does not afford) should be added to preserve the military flavour of the character; in this particular I fail utterly, my Iago lacks the soldierly quality.[13]

"Versatility" was another characteristic of Booth's performance in the sixties. His Iago was an accomplished actor. To Othello, "the truthful, respectful adherent and friend"; to Desdemona, "the courteous servant"; to Cassio, "the open and generous fellow-soldier"; to Roderigo, "a dashing buck." To Emilia alone he remained "the inscrutable, black-browed schemer, whom she distrusts, but does not understand." [14] This swiftness of adaptation, this power of moulding himself to what others suppose him to be, distinguished the characterization at all times. The possibility that, except of course in the soliloquies, the part might be done throughout in a "bluff, vigorous, and off-hand manner" did, indeed, occur to [127] one English critic. But to have played it so would have been to miss "the constantly-changing interest, grace, and vivacity of Mr. Booth's performance." [15] It was exactly in bluffness, moreover, that Booth (as we saw) found himself wanting.

When Iago dropped his mask there were "grave and even terrible" moments.[16] Lucia Calhoun tells of one such, near the close of the tragedy: "I bleed, sir, but-not-killed" became as Booth spoke it "the mocking defiance of a devil, indeed." In later years, the baleful and

the fiendish in the character were brought out increasingly. It "seemed to be enveloped in an aura of evil"; [17] to pervade the tragedy "like an incarnation of the Evil Principle." [18] Otis Skinner remembered it as "radiant with devilish beauty"; [19] White, the Shakespearian commentator, spoke of the hate burning in the eyes—the face at times looked "snake-like." [20]

In the last act, especially, the diabolical was manifest. Cassio and Roderigo lie wounded; Iago stands over them. It is night and the street is deserted. Suddenly, the villain stabs his miserable dupe.

> ROD. *O damn'd Iago! O inhuman dog!*
> IAGO. *Kill men i' th' dark? Where be these bloody thieves? How silent is this town!*

Here, according to Booth's invention, Iago would have killed Cassio as well, and actually raised his hand to do so, only to be stayed by the sight of Lodovico and Gratiano approaching. "Ho! murder! murder!" he cries instantly; but the deed remains uncompleted.[21] Or again, near the close of the tragedy, when Othello would know why "that demi-devil" had ensnared him body and soul, and the Venetian only says:

> *Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.*
> *From this time forth I never will speak word,* [128]

Booth's utterance was accompanied by a hideous grinding of his teeth, as if, indeed, torments could never make him speak.[22] He was then led away, to stand, waiting, till suddenly the Moor stabbed himself. At that, Iago started forward as if to gloat over the destruction of his enemy. William Winter wrote approvingly that the actor "made this prodigy of wickedness live in the actual form of nature, as it lives in Shakespeare's page." [23] There were those, however, to whom the device seemed strangely old-fashioned and melodramatic. Richard Dickins, in his scarce little book, *Forty Years of Shakespeare on the English Stage,* is of this opinion. Booth's performance at the Lyceum seemed to him

> not in harmony with the rest of the picture, not in sympathy with the dominating mind. . . . I would illustrate this by saying that his Iago brought down the final curtain standing over Othello, pointing triumphantly at the dead body and gazing up at the gallery with a malignant smile of satisfied hate.[24]

Passages of quiet intensity, where Iago actually does or says little, Booth could also make memorable. Thus Irving was endlessly praised

for the realistic byplay he introduced in the scene where Iago, watching the innocent familiarities of Cassio and Desdemona, comments viciously upon them. Irving ate grapes. "The action is easy and natural enough," Mowbray Morris writes,

> yet how much less really natural to the character than Mr. Booth's still, respectful attitude, leaning against the sun-dial, alert to execute any command, seeming careless what goes on so long as he is ready when wanted, yet ever watching his prey with sly, sleepless, vigilance.[25]

Nor did his "silent hatred" of Emilia in Act IV, scene 2, escape remark.[26] [129]

In the notes, already referred to, which Booth sent to Furness for the Variorum *Othello,* he repeatedly warns the performers against theatricality. "O, you are well tun'd now," says Iago, when the lovers are happy in being reunited,

> *But I'll set down the pegs that make this music.*

And the words "should be spoken with calm assurance; not too pointedly. He knows he will make the discord,—so does the audience." [27] Just before the Temptation Scene in the third act, Iago's "I like not that" is annotated: "Don't growl this,—let it barely be heard by the audience"; and as the attack is opened, Iago's disquieting "Indeed" is not to be made conspicuous; "Contract the brows, but do not frown,—rather look disappointed, and merely mutter in surprise, 'Indeed!' " A little later, the villain begins:

> *Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,*
> *Is the immediate jewel of their souls. . . .*

and Booth writes: "Don't fire this directly at Othello, but trust to the 'whiff and wind' of it, for your effect on him, and on the audience too, although it may not gain applause from them as do the scowls and growls of the stage-villain." Still another caveat against overplaying appears in the note on Cassio's speech about his lost reputation: "In Cassio's speech . . . don't preach; be not violent; avoid rant; yet be impassioned,—feel thoroughly disgusted with yourself, and you'll be natural. Walk about, but don't stamp or 'saw the air.' "

The idea that an actor should feel the emotions he is expressing reappears in what is perhaps the finest, certainly the most idealistic, of all the notes. The Duke has attempted in vain to console Brabantio. Then they turn to state affairs. [130]

> Othello leaves Desdemona with Cassio, who regards her with tender, yet respectful admiration. Iago, at back, watches them curiously, but

let him not be obtrusive; he must keep in the background and assume this expression, and feel the curiousness, even if only one person in the whole audience sees or understands it; the "censure," as Hamlet calls it, of that one is worth all the rest.

But did Booth, himself, "feel the curiousness"? Was he like Macready in experiencing the emotions of his characters? It is impossible to be sure. We hear of how greatly his performances varied. At times, we are told by one who observed him closely, "he was somewhere else, and his art moved in a mist." [28] Was it that at just such times emotion had completely failed him?

Finally, the sensitiveness of Booth's feeling for the play is repeatedly suggested by his annotations. Cassio greets Desdemona in courtly terms upon her safe arrival in Cyprus. Then he turns to Emilia:

> *Welcome mistress.—*
> *Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,*
> *That I extend my manners. 'Tis my breeding*
> *That gives me this bold show of courtesy.*

So saying, he kisses her—kisses her face, as Booth points out, "not, as is frequently done, her hand"—and "Iago winces slightly, for he 'suspects Cassio with his nightcap.' " When, again, they are talking of Desdemona just before the Drinking Scene—"What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation"—"Iago watches Cassio intently." In each case, the rightness of the action called for is obvious. Such notes as these have almost the value of original stage-directions. [131]

NOTES

[1] Special matinées were added later in the engagement, which continued until the middle of June.

[2] See, especially, *The Illustrated London News,* May 7, 1881.

[3] *What the Author Meant,* London, 1932, p. 79. For the crowding "pittites," see also Sir John Martin-Harvey, *Autobiography,* London [1933], p. 42.

[4] Mowbray Morris, *Essays in Theatrical Criticism,* London, 1882, pp. 94, 95.

[5] Review by Mowbray Morris, May 11, 1881. Many writers, of course, gave the advantage to Irving.

[6] "Then Meiningen Company and the London Stage," *Blackwood's,* August 1881.

[7] *Essays in Theatrical Criticism,* 98.

[8] "Edwin Booth," in McKay and Wingate, *Famous American Actors of Today,* New York and Boston [1896], pp. 36, 37; cf. his *Reminiscences of a Dramatic Critic,* Boston and New York, 1902, pp. 135, 136.

[9] "Edwin Booth," *The Galaxy,* January 1869. Winter speaks approvingly, however, of "the subtle use of gesture and facial play" by means of which Booth made Iago's duplicity evident to the spectators (*Shakespeare on the Stage,* 271), and there were suggestions of the villain in his dress (*The Athenaeum,* January 22, 1881).

[10] *Nights at the Play,* II, 303.

[11] *Sixty Years of the Theater,* New York and London, 1916, pp. 190, 191.

[12] Page 146. Mr. Lockridge has made good use of these notes (*Darling of Misfortune,* New York and London [1932], pp. 341ff.).

[13] Furness Variorum *Othello,* p. 214. "Lithe" is a term frequently applied to Booth's Iago, and for "sinuosity" cf. R. G. White, *Studies in Shakespeare,* Boston and New York, 1885, p. 265.

[14] Lucia Calhoun, "Edwin Booth."

[15] *Saturday Review,* January 29, 1881.

[16] *Ibid.* When Iago was alone he seemed "more than a demi-devil" (May 14, 1881).

[17] Towse, *Sixty Years of the Theater,* 190.

[18] Cook, *Nights at the Play,* II, 303.

[19] *Footlights and Spotlights,* New York [1924], p. 93.

[20] *Studies in Shakespeare,* 265.

[21] Winter, *Life and Art of Edwin Booth,* 113, 247.

[22] See especially Katherine Goodale, *Behind the Scenes with Edwin Booth,* Boston and New York [1931], p. 110; Booth in Furness Variorum *Othello,* p. 324; Skinner, *Footlights and Spotlights,* 94.

[23] *Life and Art of Edwin Booth,* 197; *The Shakespearean Plays of Edwin Booth,* ed. Winter, II, 111.

[24] Page 40 (privately printed, presumably in London, *c.* 1907); see also Percy Fitzgerald, *Henry Irving: A Record of Twenty Years at the Lyceum,* London, 1893, p. 170

[25] *Essays in Theatrical Criticism,* p. 102.

[26] *The Saturday Review,* January 29, 1881. The half-menacing words he addresses to her were spoken "almost as an aside" (*The Athenaeum,* January 22, 1881; cf. Furness Variorum *Othello,* pp. 267, 268).

[27] Page 114. I have known Iago to get a laugh here—to the actor's shame.

[28] Royle, *Edwin Booth as I knew Him,* 35. Winter and Copeland agree on the extreme inequality of Booth's acting.

Producing *Othello*

MARGARET WEBSTER

Prof. E. E. Stoll, writing with a vivid sense of theatre, as against literary valuation, disclaims as "neither here nor there" the psychological explanations with which analysts have tried to codify and pigeonhole the behavior of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. We shall need, he says, "that willing suspension of disbelief which [232] constitutes poetic faith." If we do need even this, we shall easily acquire it. For Shakespeare keeps faith with the characters he postulates, and he keeps theatre faith with his audience; in no play does he more clearly demonstrate his mastery than in the most human of the four tragedies, *Othello*.

There are no ghosts in *Othello,* no supernatural solicitings, no inexplicable convulsions of nature, no imagery even, as there is so strongly in *Lear,* of the primeval characteristics of the animal world to which Lear's world is so nearly akin. There is human passion, of which the germ is in each one of us, raised to its highest pitch, and forged to a white heat of dramatic action.

The postulate which we have in this instance to accept seems to me to be not that of Othello, whom we see transformed before our eyes, but of Iago. Critics have made a great to-do over the nature of Iago, and echoed in many forms Othello's own question:

> *Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil*
> *Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?*
> (V. 2. 308)

There is an agreement that the motives which Iago himself successfully advances either in soliloquy or to Roderigo, his resentment over

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the promotion of Cassio, his suspicion of Othello and Emilia, his even more perfunctory suspicion of Emilia and Cassio in no way fully account for his "hatred" of the Moor. He has been described as a man who loves evil for evil's sake and, much more convincingly, as a man with a superiority [233] complex reveling in his own power to destroy someone whom the world has agreed to set above him.

The plain theatre fact, however, is that audiences have never been bothered in the smallest degree by any doubtful "motivation" in Iago. They have accepted him, hook, line, and sinker, and the part has always been effective to the point of stealing the play from Othello himself, probably because it does not make any emotional demands upon the actor which are beyond the normal man's compass.

The universal acceptance of Iago as "honest," another postulate which has been widely questioned, has been often belied in the theatre. Iagos have adopted the sinister mien of a typical Italianate villain to an extent which would cause any sensible housewife to hide the silver spoons the moment he crossed the threshold. There is nothing intrinsically improbable about Iago's apparent honesty, and it is important to the play that it be plausible not only to the other characters but to the audience, if Othello is not to appear unforgivably gullible. Iago is very fully revealed in the text, without the aid of sidelong glances, evil chuckles, and a waxed moustache. The brilliant speed of his small, unscrupulous thinking, the dash of recklessness, the complete worldly armory of his mind, the plentitude of will and the absolute lack of imagination are all full and clear and contrasted unerringly with Othello's utterly alien make-up. A theatrical cast of villainy will ruin both of them.

The very quality of Iago's speech is differentiated from Othello's by every possible means. Except for the [234] soliloquies, it is almost all in prose, light, acute, beautifully phrased, every cynical, easy turn of it unerringly directed. It needs polish, precision, and extreme lucidity in the speaking, little music. Othello, who early says of himself "Rude am I in my speech," is to run an orchestral gamut, always spiced with the flavor of strangeness and enriched with the color of the East and the burnished sun. He is to talk of "antres vast and deserts idle," of sibyls "that had numbered in the world the sun to course two hundred compasses," of Arabian trees and turbaned Turks and Ottomites and anthropophagi. But the measured gravity of his first address to the Senate,

Most potent, grave and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved good masters,

will change to a passionate agony of tumbling phrases, to the almost unintelligible ravings of "Lie with her! lie in her!—We say lie on her, when they belie her.—Lie with her! 'Zounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchiefs—confession—handkerchiefs!" And it will change again, under the sway of a great and noble sorrow far transcending the initial passion of jealousy, to the sacrificial majesty of:

Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me: but once put out thine,
Thou cunning pattern of eternal nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. (V. 2. 7)

It is commonly, and as I think erroneously, supposed [235] that Othello must carry us on a torrent of sound past some intrinsic improbabilities of characterization. Mr. Shaw has said: "The words do not convey ideas—they are streaming ensigns and tossing branches to make the tempest of passion visible. . . . Tested by the brain it is ridiculous; tested by the ear it is sublime." It is, of course, the fury of Othello's so-called "jealousy" that strikes Mr. Shaw as ridiculous, which, in Mr. Shaw, can hardly be regarded as surprising.

Many critics have, however, stressed the factual improbability of the situation, the impossible shortness of time, the intervention of fortuitous events, such as the dropping of the handkerchief, which alone makes possible the success of Iago's scheme. And it has been thought that despite the actor's advantage of spoken and magnificent verse, he will be unable to make us believe Othello, but that the audience will simply echo Emilia's "Nay, lay thee down and roar," with as great and callous a contempt.

It is true that many of the cultured gentlemen, reluctantly and faintly disguising from us their familiar features under a layer of becoming coffee-colored grease paint, rather as if they had recently returned from Palm Beach, have seemed to us possessed of far too much intelligence, restraint, and self-control ever to be swept by an uncontrollable passion which is not from the mind at all and only a little from the heart, but principally from the bowels. Mr. Knight says

of this emotional situation that "it does not mesh with our minds." It does not, indeed; but then it was never intended to do so.

Othello's emotional functioning is alien to most of us, [236] though up to a point we may parallel it, upon occasion in newspaper headlines about some so-called "sex" murderer. But Othello himself is alien; the process of his feeling is as strange to Desdemona as hers to him; the gulf which opens between them once the sympathy of their cooler mental concord is lost, is a gulf between two races, the one old in the soft ways of civilization, the other close to the jungle and the burning desert sands. Iago, even, knowing every twist which can be given to the Moor because of his alien and "inferior" race, does not reckon with the full primitive power of the passion which he unleashes.

For the question of Othello's race is of paramount importance to the play. There has been much controversy as to Shakespeare's intention. It is improbable that he troubled himself greatly with ethnological exactness. The Moor, to an Elizabethan, was a blackamoor, an African, an Ethiopian. Shakespeare's other Moor, Aaron, in *Titus Andronicus,* is specifically black; he has thick lips and a fleece of woolly hair. The Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* bears "the shadowed livery of the burnished sun," and even Portia recoils from his "complexion" which he himself is at great pains to excuse.

Othello is repeatedly described, both by himself and others, as black; not pale beige, but black; and for a century and a half after the play's first presentation he was so represented on the stage. But after this the close consideration of nice minds began to discern something not quite ladylike about Desdemona's marrying a black man with thick lips. They cannot have been more [237] horrified than Brabantio, her father, who thought that only witchcraft could have caused "nature so preposterously to err," or more convinced of the disastrous outcome of such a match than Iago, who looked upon it as nothing but a "frail vow between an erring Barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian," and declared, with his invincible cynicism, that "when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice: She must have change; she must!"

It is very apparent, and vital to the play, that Othello himself was very conscious of these same considerations and quiveringly aware of what the judgment of the world would be upon his marriage. It is one of the most potent factors in his acceptance of the possibility of Desdemona's infidelity. And she herself loses much in the quality of her steadfastness and courage if it be supposed that she simply mar-

ried against her father's wishes a man who chanced to be a little darker than his fellows, instead of daring a marriage which would cause universal condemnation among the ladies of polite society. To scamp this consideration in the play is to deprive Othello of his greatest weakness, Desdemona of her highest strength, Iago of his skill and judgment, Emilia of a powerful factor in her behavior both to her master and her mistress, and Venice itself of an arrogance in toleration which was one of the principal hallmarks of its civilization—a civilization which frames, first and last, the soaring emotions of the play.

After these three tragedies, Shakespeare will never again take us into so passion-tossed a world, never set his actors to release themselves so fully from the normal [238] restraints of polite behavior, never pound his audience into submission by the relentless power of words. He will give us a jealous man in Leontes, an ambitious one in Octavius, an embittered outcast in Timon, but it will not be the sacrificial jealousy of Othello, the haunted ambition of Macbeth, or the madness, of Lear. Nothing that happens in the later plays will carry us beyond the sphere where reason is still a comfortable guide. Nor will man ever again cry with such anguish to the stars to shield him from the unbearable responsibility of the world he has fashioned. The theatre will revert to its normal self, its walls solid and comfortably bounding the two hours' traffic of make-believe. There will be plenty of technical problems to be faced. *Antony and Cleopatra* especially will call for a width and range of vision; many of the plays to come will need adroit and lavish handling. But never again will the hearts of players and audience be so swept with the mystery of life and the bitter release of death. [239]

Othello at Stratford, England, 1956

RICHARD DAVID

The speed of *Othello* is partly generated by the periodic injection, into a dialogue already tense, of sudden spirts of action: the entry of Brabantio and his followers to arrest Othello, the arrival [131] in Cyprus, the brawl, Othello's half-throttling of Iago, the swoon, the striking of Desdemona. All this was brilliantly managed by Byam Shaw, who has made peculiarly his own a trick of suddenly filling the stage with a rapid swirl of motion: the banter flags between Iago and Desdemona, newly landed in Cyprus, there is a stir off-stage that grows almost instantaneously to a tumult, and there is Othello, victorious and radiant, at the centre of the stage, his soldiers about him and his standard flaunting above his head. The brawl was first-rate, exploding out of nowhere and convincingly violent. Othello's striking of his wife, too, generally a weak scene, was here a major climax, the producer cleverly exploiting the special qualities of Miss Johnston's gallant and spirited Desdemona. Five seconds of horror-struck stillness followed the blow, and then Desdemona's control cracked suddenly in outraged sobbing (the same trick that last year made the Lady Macduff scene); and her agony was unbearably prolonged by allowing her to climb to the top of the staircase before Othello, maliciously misinterpreting the ambassador's words, calls her back for further humiliation.

The sense of speed derives also from the famous 'double time' of the play. One reckoning hustles the whole of the action at Cyprus into twenty-four hours. A second suggests the lapse of a week or more.

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Now in this longer time Desdemona's misconduct is just conceivable, but Othello must still go through the whole gamut of behavior, from highest nobility to the most abject barbarity and back to nobility again, in a period that, whether measured in terms of drama or of actuality, is too short to contain so large a process. Othello is accordingly shown only at certain points in his course, and between each appearance his state is liable to undergo an unexpected boosting. It is the business of the producer to give the illusion of a continuous and ordered progress, making these gear-changes silently.

The most violent occur between the first and second temptation scenes, and before Othello's final entry to kill Desdemona. In the first temptation scene Iago succeeds in putting the idea of betrayal into Othello's mind, but at the end of it as the Moor goes off to supper he can still say

> *If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!*
> *I'll not believe't.*

Yet when he returns, only forty lines later, he does believe in Desdemona's guilt, and in his own disgrace—"What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?" and "Farewell . . . Othello's occupation's gone." On this Iago comments "Is't possible?", and there is real danger that the audience will answer "No".

Here Byam Shaw and his Othello, Harry Andrews, courted danger by stressing the Moor's confidence. The encounter opened with Othello seating himself, back to the audience, at a central table to examine the map of the fortifications. Iago, standing at the head of a little staircase, stage right, had visibly to steel himself for the attempt, which he began by taking three steps, at once fateful and gingerly, down the staircase into the arena. His first gambit was a complete failure. Othello's "Why, why is this?" was spoken in exasperated amusement at Iago's riddling, not in fear of his insinuations; and Iago was compelled, with still greater effort, to screw up his courage again before launching the second attack. It is obvious that the scene is very much more exciting if Iago's victory is not a walk-over, and if his own danger is emphasized. Othello is a bomb that will certainly explode if the technician engaged on drawing its sting should fumble or be slow to change his tactics at the first whisper of trouble. So it was here: [132] the scene in itself was thrilling, and I am sure it should be played thus. Yet unless Othello shows, at the second attempt, a much greater acceleration of passion than Andrews achieved, the break between this scene and the next will gape all the more. This transition was one of two

things better done at the Old Vic, for Burton, initially as unruffled as Andrews, produced a sudden flare in the second half of the scene that linked his exit naturally with his distraught re-entry.

"It is the cause" is simply one of the hardest of Shakespeare's speeches, and I have never yet heard it come off. We have just seen Othello gloating over the assassination (as he thinks) of Cassio. Now he comes to murder Desdemona; but the moods of the two killings are very different. One is revenge, the other execution. Cassio he hates; Desdemona he loves (he tells us so) even as he kills her, but he is heaven's instrument and must destroy that which has flouted heaven, whatever his personal feelings. The speech, then, must be hieratic, sublime. Indeed the whole scene must have sublimity, for we must not take Emilia's abuse too seriously and, after a moment of utter confusion and abasement, the Moor regains his full nobility. He has executed Desdemona in what he thought was justice. Now he finds it was not so, and for his injustice he executes himself. If Othello becomes a mere scarecrow of grief, the whole burden of the scene falls upon Emilia, and however hard she works to keep up the interest it is almost bound to flag, as it did both at Stratford and at the Old Vic. Uncle Gratiano and the other onlookers, who should lighten the tension, dissipate it altogether. Then the carpers have some excuse for finding Othello a fool and a posturing wind-bag, and the play a failure.

It is here that the choice of hero tells. He is a Moor, an alien, alien in colour, nature, upbringing. That he is foreign in every sense, not a civilized man as civilized men understand each other, is at once the point of the play, the germ of Iago's plot, and the solution of the playwright's technical problem. Othello's tragedy is the tragedy of Adam, natural nobility enmeshed by experience; upon the incalculability of the Moor Iago makes his calculations; and in a noble savage savagery, nobility, and the alternation between them are all explicable.

Othello, then, must never be a European, tastefully browned. Of the three actors who attempted the part, two at the Old Vic and one at Stratford, John Neville perhaps got nearest to the essential strangeness, but he lacked the magnificence, and became weaselish in affliction. Burton had more of the size, but his all-too-reasonable despair seemed mere self-pity. Andrews had the power, something of the glory and, at moments, a touch of exotic fascination. His narration to the senate was far and away the best of the three: no set oration but a rapt re-living of his adventures and of the wooing they set on. On the whole, however, this Othello, like so many others, remained too penny-

plain. For this I partly blame Motley's clothes: a close-fitting scarlet guardee uniform, and for the bedroom a green smoking-jacket and black court smalls (the traditional dressing-gown appeared only momentarily, to quell the brawl). No doubt these styles were intended to exorcise the romantic view of Othello and make us focus on him anew. The process went too far. The uniform made of him at best an Emperor Jones, at worst an organ-grinder's monkey; and no one, black or white, can commit murder in jacket and knee-breeches and get away with it.

The Iago of Emlyn Williams was a pleasure to watch. Played with precision and control, every stroke telling, the worst that could be said of it was that it never really engaged with the Othello. . . . It was an exhibition of knife-throwing, the blades placed with exquisite neatness round the unconscious victim, never a duel. The cold deliberation of Iago's playing, [133] besides providing no foothold for Othello's trust or the others' good-fellowship, petrified the opening of the play, which did not quicken until the splendid senate scene. Both Old Vic Iagos brought to this opening a sense of desperate malice straining to be unleashed, an immense imminence of evil. Iago's hoarse and intemperate imprecations, vaulting over Roderigo's more polite appeals, urged the scene quickly to a climax. Burton's Iago indeed (Neville's was no more than personified spite) was nearly a very great one. For once the revelation that Iago is no more than "four times seven years" did not come as a shock. Debonair, open-faced, as winning as Steerforth and as reliable as Claggart, he might have won any comrade's trust. The manipulation of Othello had just the right air of deft experiment; the humour a touch of lower-deck roughness, the sex-jokes a hint (no more) of over-emphasis. It was only in the soliloquies that Burton's Iago failed, for they must be explosive, revealing in a flash that the touch of roughness is innate brutality, the sex-jokes a symptom of pathological obsession. Emlyn Williams gave the soliloquies explosiveness, but what they revealed was no more than already appeared in his daily conversation. Neither actor gave us the whole of Iago. [134]

Othello and Tragedy

Tragedy

ARISTOTLE

4. If it be asked whether Tragedy is now all that it need be in its formative elements, to consider that, and decide it theoretically and in relation to the theatres, is a matter for another inquiry.

It certainly began in improvisations—as did also Comedy; the one originating with the authors of the Dithyramb, the other with those of the phallic songs, which still survive as institutions in many of our cities. And its advance after that was little by little, through their improving on whatever they had before them at each stage. It was in fact only after a long series of changes that the movement of Tragedy stopped on its attaining to its natural form. (1) The number of actors was first increased to two by Aeschylus, who curtailed the business of the Chorus, and made the dialogue, or spoken portion, take the leading part in the play. (2) A third actor and scenery were due to Sophocles. (3) Tragedy acquired also its magnitude. Discarding short stories and a ludicrous diction, through its passing out of its satyric stage, it assumed, though only at a late point in its progress, a tone of dignity; and its metre changed then from trochaic to iambic. The reason for their original use of the trochaic tetrameter was that their poetry was satyric and more connected with dancing than it now is. As soon, however, as a spoken part came in, nature herself found the appropriate metre. The iambic, we know, is the most speakable of metres, as is shown by the fact that we very often fall into it in conversation, whereas we rarely talk hexameters, and only when we depart from the speaking tone of voice. (4) Another change was a plurality of episodes or acts. As for the remaining matters, the superadded embellishments and the account of their introduction, these must be taken as

From Chapters 4–15 of Aristotle's *Poetics,* translated by Ingram Bywater (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1920), pp. 133–40. Reprinted by permission of The Clarendon Press.

said, as it would probably be a long piece of work to go through the details. [133]

5. As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.

Though the successive changes in Tragedy and their authors are not unknown, we cannot say the same of Comedy; its early stages passed unnoticed, because it was not as yet taken up in a serious way. It was only at a late point in its progress that a chorus of comedians was officially granted by the archon; they used to be mere volunteers. It had also already certain definite forms at the time when the record of those termed comic poets begins. Who it was who supplied it with masks, or prologues, or a plurality of actors and the like, has remained unknown. The invented Fable, or Plot, however, originated in Sicily with Epicharmus and Phormis; of Athenian poets Crates was the first to drop the Comedy of invective and frame stories of a general and non-personal nature, in other words, Fables or Plots.

Epic poetry, then, has been seen to agree with Tragedy to this extent, that of being an imitation of serious subjects in a grand kind of verse. It differs from it, however, (1) in that it is in one kind of verse and in narrative form; and (2) in its length—which is due to its action having no fixed limit of time, whereas Tragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that. This, I say, is another point of difference between them, though at first the practice in this respect was just the same in tragedies as in epic poems. They differ also (3) in their constituents, some being common to both and others peculiar to Tragedy—hence a judge of good and bad in Tragedy is a judge of that in epic poetry also. All the parts of an epic are included in Tragedy; but those of Tragedy are not all of them to be found in the Epic.

6. Reserving hexameter poetry and Comedy for consideration hereafter, let us proceed now to the discussion of Tragedy; before doing so, however, we must gather up the definition resulting from what has been said. A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is

serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. Here by "language with pleasurable accessories" I mean that with rhythm and harmony or song superadded; and by "the kinds separately" I mean that some portions are worked out with verse only, and others in turn with song.

As they act the stories, it follows that in the first place the Spectacle (or stage-appearance of the actors) must be some part of the whole; and in the second Melody and Diction, these two being the means of their imitation. Here by "Diction" I mean merely this, the composition of the verses; and by "Melody," what is too completely understood to require explanation. But further: the subject represented also is an action; and the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought, since it is from these that we ascribe certain qualities to their actions. There are in the natural order of things, therefore, two causes, Thought and Character, of their actions, and consequently of their success or failure in their lives. Now the action (that which was done) is represented in the play by the Fable or Plot. The Fable, in our present sense of the term, is simply this, the combination of the incidents, or things done in the story; whereas Character is what makes us ascribe certain moral qualities to the agents; and Thought is shown in all they say when proving a particular point or, it may be, enunciating a general truth. There are six parts consequently of every tragedy, as a whole (that is) of such or such quality, viz., a Fable or Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody; two of them arising from the means, one from the manner, and three from the objects of the dramatic imitation; and there is [134] nothing else besides these six. Of these, its formative elements, then, not a few of the dramatists have made due use, as every play, one may say, admits of Spectacle, Character, Fable, Diction, Melody, and Thought.

The most important of the six is the combination of the incidents of the story. Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions—what we do—that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they

include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e., its Fable or Plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing. Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. The tragedies of most of the moderns are characterless—a defect common among poets of all kinds, and with its counterpart in painting in Zeuxis as compared with Polygnotus; for whereas the latter is strong in character, the work of Zeuxis is devoid of it. And again: one may string together a series of characteristic speeches of the utmost finish as regards Diction and Thought, and yet fail to produce the true tragic effect; but one will have much better success with a tragedy which, however inferior in these respects, has a Plot, a combination of incidents, in it. And again: the most powerful elements of attraction in Tragedy, the Peripeties [reversals] and Discoveries, are parts of the Plot. A further proof is in the fact that beginners succeed earlier with the Diction and Characters than with the construction of a story; and the same may be said of nearly all the early dramatists. We maintain, therefore, that the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot; and that the Characters come second—compare the parallel in painting, where the most beautiful colours laid on without order will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait. We maintain that Tragedy is primarily an imitation of action, and that it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents. Third comes the element of Thought, i.e., the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion. This is what, in the speeches in Tragedy, falls under the arts of Politics and Rhetoric; for the older poets make their personages discourse like statesmen, and the modern like rhetoricians. One must not confuse it with Character. Character in a play is that which reveals the moral purpose of the agents, i.e., the sort of thing they seek or avoid, where that is not obvious—hence there is no room for Character in a speech on a purely indifferent subject. Thought, on the other hand, is shown in all they say when proving or disproving some particular point, or enunciating some universal proposition. Fourth among the literary elements is the Diction of the personages, i.e., as before explained, the expression of their thoughts in words, which is practically the same thing with verse as with prose. As for the two remaining parts, the Melody is the greatest of the pleasurable accessories of Tragedy. The Spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry. The tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance

and actors; and besides, the getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than the poet.

7. Having thus distinguished the parts, let us now consider the proper construction of the Fable or Plot, as that is at once the first and the most important thing in Tragedy. We have laid it down that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude; for a whole may be of no magnitude to speak of. Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well-constructed Plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described. Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain [135] definite magnitude. Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size—one, say, 1,000 miles long—as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder. Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, but a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story or Plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory. As for the limit of its length, so far as that is relative to public performances and spectators, it does not fall within the theory of poetry. If they had to perform a hundred tragedies, they would be timed by water-clocks, as they are said to have been at one period. The limit, however, set by the actual nature of the thing is this: the longer the story, consistently with its being comprehensible as a whole, the finer it is by reason of its magnitude. As a rough general formula, "a length which allows of the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune," may suffice as a limit for the magnitude of the story.

8. The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one

man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity; and in like manner there are many actions of one man which cannot be made to form one action. One sees, therefore, the mistake of all the poets who have written a *Heracleid,* a *Theseid,* or similar poems; they suppose that, because Heracles was one man, the story also of Heracles must be one story. Homer, however, evidently understood this point quite well, whether by art or instinct, just in the same way as he excels the rest in every other respect. In writing an *Odyssey,* he did not make the poem cover all that ever befell his hero—it befell him, for instance, to get wounded on Parnassus and also to feign madness at the time of the call to arms, but the two incidents had no necessary or probable connexion with one another—instead of doing that, he took as the subject of the *Odyssey,* as also of the *Iliad,* an action with a Unity of the kind we are describing. The truth is that, just as in the other imitative arts one imitation is always of one thing, so in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole.

9. From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse—you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do—which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. In Comedy this has become clear by this time; it is only when their plot is already made up of probable incidents that they give it a basis of proper names, choosing for the purpose any names that may occur to them, instead of writing like the old iambic poets about particular persons. In Tragedy, however, they still adhere to the historic

names; and for this reason: what convinces is the possible; now whereas we are not yet sure as to the possibility of that which has not happened, that which has happened is manifestly possible, else it would not have come to pass. Nevertheless even in Tragedy there are some plays with but one or two known names in them, the rest being inventions; and there are some without a single known name, e.g., Agathon's *Antheus,* in which both incidents and names are of the poet's invention; and it is no less delightful on that account. So that one must not aim at a rigid adherence to the traditional stories on which [136] tragedies are based. It would be absurd, in fact, to do so, as even the known stories are only known to a few, though they are a delight none the less to all.

It is evident from the above that the poet must be more the poet of his stories or Plots than of his verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of the imitative element in his work, and it is actions that he imitates. And if he should come to take a subject from actual history, he is none the less a poet for that; since some historic occurrences may very well be in the probable and possible order of things; and it is in that aspect of them that he is their poet.

Of simple Plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a Plot episodic when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of its episodes. Actions of this sort bad poets construct through their own fault, and good ones on account of the players. His work being for public performance, a good poet often stretches out a Plot beyond its capabilities, and is thus obliged to twist the sequence of incident.

Tragedy, however, is an imitation not only of a complete action, but also of incidents arousing pity and fear. Such incidents have the very greatest effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another; there is more of the marvellous in them then than if they happened of themselves or by mere chance. Even matters of chance seem most marvellous if there is an appearance of design as it were in them; as for instance the statue of Mitys at Argos killed the author of Mitys' death by falling down on him when a looker-on at a public spectacle; for incidents like that we think to be not without a meaning. A Plot, therefore, of this sort is necessarily finer than others.

10. Plots are either simple or complex, since the actions they represent are naturally of this twofold description. The action, proceeding in the way defined, as one continuous whole, I call simple, when the

change in the hero's fortunes takes place without Peripety or Discovery; and complex, when it involves one or the other, or both. These should each of them arise out of the structure of the Plot itself, so as to be the consequence, necessary or probable, of the antecedents. There is a great difference between a thing happening *propter hoc* and *post hoc.*

11. A Peripety is the change of the kind described from one state of things within the play to its opposite, and that too in the way we are saying, in the probable or necessary sequence of events; as it is for instance in *Oedipus:* here the opposite state of things is produced by the Messenger, who, coming to gladden Oedipus and to remove his fears as to his mother, reveals the secret of his birth. And in *Lynceus:* just as he is being led off for execution, with Danaus at his side to put him to death, the incidents preceding this bring it about that he is saved and Danaus put to death. A Discovery is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune. The finest form of Discovery is one attended by Peripeties, like that which goes with the Discovery in *Oedipus.* There are no doubt other forms of it; what we have said may happen in a way in reference to inanimate things, even things of a very casual kind; and it is also possible to discover whether some one has done or not done something. But the form most directly connected with the Plot and the action of the piece is the first-mentioned. This, with a Peripety, will arouse either pity or fear—actions of that nature being what Tragedy is assumed to represent; and it will also serve to bring about the happy or unhappy ending. The Discovery, then, being of persons, it may be that of one party only to the other, the latter being already known; or both the parties may have to discover themselves. Iphigenia, for instance, was discovered to Orestes by sending the letter; and another Discovery was required to reveal him to Iphigenia.

Two parts of the Plot, then, Peripety and Discovery, are on matters of this sort. A third part is Suffering; which we may define as an action of a destructive or painful nature, such as murders on the stage, tortures, woundings, and the like. The other two have been already explained.

12. The parts of Tragedy to be treated as formative elements in the whole were mentioned in a previous Chapter. From the point of

view, however, of its quantity, i.e., the separate sections into which it is divided, a tragedy has the [137] following parts: Prologue, Episode, Exode, and a choral portion, distinguished into Parode and Stasimon; these two are common to all tragedies, whereas songs from the stage and *Commoe* are only found in some. The Prologue is all that precedes the Parode of the chorus; an Episode all that comes in between two whole choral songs; the Exode all that follows after the last choral song. In the choral portion the Parode is the whole first statement of the chorus; a Stasimon, a song of the chorus without anapaests or trochees; a *Commos,* a lamentation sung by chorus and actor in concert. The parts of Tragedy to be used as formative elements in the whole we have already mentioned; the above are its parts from the point of view of its quantity, or the separate sections into which it is divided.

13. The next points after what we have said above will be these: (1) What is the poet to aim at, and what is he to avoid, in constructing his Plots? and (2) What are the conditions on which the tragic effect depends?

We assume that, for the finest form of Tragedy, the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing fear and pity, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation. It follows, therefore, that there are three forms of Plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feelings in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves; so that there will be nothing either piteous or fear-inspiring in the situation. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g., Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families. The perfect Plot, accordingly, must have a single, and not (as some tell us) a double issue;

the change in the hero's fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that. Fact also confirms our theory. Though the poets began by accepting any tragic story that came to hand, in these days the finest tragedies are always on the story of some few houses, on that of Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, or any others that may have been involved, as either agents or sufferers, in some deed of horror. The theoretically best tragedy, then, has a Plot of this description. The critics, therefore, are wrong who blame Euripides for taking this line in his tragedies, and giving many of them an unhappy ending. It is, as we have said, the right line to take. The best proof is this: on the stage, and in the public performances, such plays, properly worked out, are seen to be the most truly tragic; and Euripides, even if his execution be faulty in every other point, is seen to be nevertheless the most tragic certainly of the dramatists. After this comes the construction of Plot which some rank first, one with a double story (like the *Odyssey*) and an opposite issue for the good and the bad personages. It is ranked as first only through the weakness of the audiences; the poets merely follow their public, writing as its wishes dictate. But the pleasure here is not that of Tragedy. It belongs rather to Comedy, where the bitterest enemies in the piece (e.g., Orestes and Aegisthus) walk off good friends at the end, with no slaying of any one by any one.

14. The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play—which is the better way and shows the better poet. The Plot in fact should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents; [138] which is just the effect that the mere recital of the story in *Oedipus* would have on one. To produce this same effect by means of the Spectacle is less artistic, and requires extraneous aid. Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy; not every kind of pleasure should be required of a tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure.

The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation; it is clear, therefore, that the causes

should be included in the incidents of his story. Let us see, then, what kinds of incident strike one as horrible, or rather as piteous. In a deed of this description the parties must necessarily be either friends, or enemies, or indifferent to one another. Now when enemy does it on enemy, there is nothing to move us to pity either in his doing or in his meditating the deed, except so far as the actual pain of the sufferer is concerned; and the same is true when the parties are indifferent to one another. Whenever the tragic deed, however, is done within the family—when murder or the like is done or meditated by brother on brother, by son on father, by mother on son, or son on mother—these are the situations the poet should seek after. The traditional stories, accordingly, must be kept as they are, e.g., the murder of Clytaemnestra by Orestes and of Eriphyle by Alcmeon. At the same time even with these there is something left to the poet himself; it is for him to devise the right way of treating them. Let us explain more clearly what we mean by "the right way." The deed of horror may be done by the doer knowingly and consciously, as in the old poets, and in Medea's murder of her children in Euripides. Or he may do it, but in ignorance of his relationship, and discover that afterwards, as does the Oedipus in Sophocles. Here the deed is outside the play; but it may be within it, like the act of the Alcmeon in Astydamas, or that of the Telegonus in *Ulysses Wounded*. A third possibility is for one meditating some deadly injury to another, in ignorance of his relationship, to make the discovery in time to draw back. These exhaust the possibilities, since the deed must necessarily be either done or not done, and either knowingly or unknowingly.

The worst situation is when the personage is with full knowledge on the point of doing the deed, and leaves it undone. It is odious and also (through the absence of suffering) untragic; hence it is that no one is made to act thus except in some few instances, e.g., Haemon and Creon in *Antigone*. Next after this comes the actual perpetration of the deed meditated. A better situation than that, however, is for the deed to be done in ignorance, and the relationship discovered afterwards, since there is nothing odious in it, and the Discovery will serve to astound us. But the best of all is the last; what we have in *Cresphontes,* for example, where Merope, on the point of slaying her son, recognizes him in time; in *Iphigenia,* where sister and brother are in a like position; and in *Helle,* where the son recognizes his mother, when on the point of giving her up to her enemy.

This will explain why our tragedies are restricted (as we said just

now) to such a small number of families. It was accident rather than art that led the poets in quest of subjects to embody this kind of incident in their Plots. They are still obliged, accordingly, to have recourse to the families in which such horrors have occurred.

On the construction of the Plot, and the kind of Plot required for Tragedy, enough has now been said.

15. In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. There will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose so revealed is good. Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an [139] inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever. The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent. We have an instance of baseness of character, not required for the story, in the Menelaus in *Orestes;* of the incongruous and unbefitting in the lamentation of Ulysses in *Scylla,* and in the (clever) speech of Melanippe; and of inconsistency in *Iphigenia at Aulis,* where Iphigenia the suppliant is utterly unlike the later Iphigenia. The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavour always after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it. From this one sees (to digress for a moment) that the Dénouement also should arise out of the plot itself, and not depend on a stage-artifice, as in *Medea,* or in the story of the (arrested) departure of the Greeks in the *Iliad.* The artifice must be reserved for matters outside the play—for past events beyond human knowledge, or events yet to come, which require to be foretold or announced; since it is the privilege of the Gods to know everything. There should be nothing improbable among the actual incidents. If it be unavoidable, however, it should be outside

the tragedy, like the improbability in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles. But to return to the Characters. As Tragedy is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man, we in our way should follow the example of good portrait-painters, who reproduce the distinctive features of a man, and at the same time, without losing the likeness, make him handsomer than he is. The poet in like manner, in portraying men quick or slow to anger, or with similar infirmities of character, must know how to represent them as such, and at the same time as good men, as Agathon and Homer have represented Achilles.

All these rules one must keep in mind throughout, and, further, those also for such points of stage-effect as directly depend on the art of the poet, since in these too one may often make mistakes. [140]

The Tragic Form

RICHARD B. SEWALL

A discussion of tragedy is confronted at the outset with the strenuous objections of Croce, who would have no truck with the genres. 'Art is one,' he wrote in his famous *Britannica* article,[1] 'and cannot be divided.' For convenience, he would allow the division of Shakespeare's plays into tragedies, comedies, and histories, but he warned of the dogmatism that lay in any further refining of distinctions. He made a special point of tragedy, which as usual was the fighting issue. No artist, he said, will submit to the servitude of the traditional definition: that a tragedy must have a subject of a certain kind, characters of a certain kind, and a plot of a certain kind and length. Each work of art is a world in itself, 'a creation, not a reflection, a monument, not a document'. The concepts of aesthetics do not exist 'in a transcendent region' but only in innumerable specific works. To ask of a given work 'is it a tragedy?' or 'does it obey the laws of tragedy?' is irrelevant and impertinent.

Although this may be substituting one dogmatism for another, there is sense in it. Nothing is more dreary than the textbook categories; and their tendency, if carried too far, would rationalize art out of existence. The dilemma is one of critical means, not ends: Croce would preserve tragedy by insuring the autonomy of the artist; the schoolmen would preserve it by insuring the autonomy of the form.

But the dilemma is not insurmountable, as Eliot and a number of others have pointed out. There is a life-giving relationship between tradition and the individual talent, a 'wooing [345] both ways' (in R. P. Blackmur's phrase) between the form which the artist inherits and the new content he brings to it. This wooing both ways has been

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especially true of the development of tragedy, where values have been incremental, where (for instance) each new tragic protagonist is in some degree a lesser Job and each new tragic work owes an indispensable element to the Greek idea of the chorus. So I should say that, provided we can get beyond the stereotypes Croce seems to have had in mind, we should continue to talk about tragedy, to make it grow in meaning, impel more artists, and attract a greater and more discerning audience.

But we must first get a suitable idea of form. Blackmur's article [2] from which I have just quoted provides, I think, a useful suggestion. It is the concept of 'theoretic form', which he distinguishes from technical or 'executive' form. 'Technical form', he writes, 'is our means of getting at . . . and then making something of, what we feel the form of life itself is: the tensions, the stresses, the deep relations and the terrible disrelations that inhabit them . . . This is the form that underlies the forms we merely practice . . .' This (and here Croce's full concept of form is more adequately represented) is 'what Croce means by theoretic form for feeling, intuition, insight, what I mean by the theoretic form of life itself'. Discussion of the 'form' of tragedy in this sense need be neither prescriptive nor inhibiting, but it may define a little more precisely a vital area of thought and feeling.

Here is the kind of situation in which such a discussion might be helpful: Two years ago, in *Essays in Criticism* (October 1952), Miss K. M. Burton defended what she called the 'political tragedies' of Ben Jonson and George Chapman as legitimate tragedies, although non-Aristotelian. *Sejanus* was perhaps the clearest case in point. Herford and Simpson, in their commentary, had set the play down as at best 'the tragedy of a satirist', a 'proximate' tragedy, with no tragic hero and with no cathartic effect. 'Whatever effect (Jonson) aimed at', they wrote, 'it was not the purifying pity excited by the fatal errors of a noble [346] nature'. Miss Burton's reply lay in her concept of political tragedy. She saw Jonson's tragic theme as 'the manner in which evil penetrates the political structure'. The 'flaw' that concerned him lay 'within the social order', and whatever purifying pity we feel would come from contemplating the ordeal of society, not the fatal errors of a noble nature. The play for her had 'tragic intensity'; it was both 'dramatic, and a tragedy'.

Whether one agrees with her or not, the question, despite Croce, is out: 'Is the play a tragedy?' And many others follow. Can there be a tragedy without a tragic hero? Can 'the social order' play his tradi-

tional role? Is catharsis the first, or only, or even a reliable test? In a recent article, Professor Pottle wrote, 'I shall be told Aristotle settled all that'. And added, 'I wish he had'. The disagreement on *Sejanus* is symptomatic. F. L. Lucas once pointed out that (on much the same issues) Hegel thought only the Greeks wrote true tragedy; and I. A. Richards, only Shakespeare. Joseph Wood Krutch ruled out the moderns, like Hardy, Ibsen and O'Neill; and Mark Harris ruled them in.[3] The question arises about every new 'serious' play or novel; we seem to care a great deal about whether it is, or is not, a tragedy.

I have little hope of settling all this, but I am persuaded that progress lies in the direction of theoretic form, as Blackmur uses the term. Is it not possible to bring the dominant feelings, intuitions, insights that we meet in so-called tragic writings into some coherent relationship to which the word 'form' could be applied without too great violence? This is not to tell artists what to do, nor to set up strict *a priori* formulae, nor to legislate among the major genres. The problem of evaluating the total excellence of a given work involves much more than determining its status as a tragedy, or as a 'proximate' tragedy, or as a non-tragedy. It involves, among other things, the verbal management within the work and the ordering of the parts. Furthermore, our discussion need not imply the superiority of tragedy over comedy (certainly not as Dante conceived of comedy) or over epic, although, if we look upon these major [347] forms as presenting total interpretations of life, the less inclusive forms (lyric, satire) would seem to occupy inferior categories. But as we enter the world of any play or novel to which the term tragedy is at all applicable, we may well judge it by what we know about the possibilities of the form, without insisting that our judgment is absolute. If, set against the full dimensions of the tragic form, Jonson's *Sejanus* or Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (for instance) reveal undeveloped possibilities or contrary elements, we can still respect their particular modes of expression.

In indicating these dimensions of tragedy, I shall be mindful of Unamuno's warning [4] that tragedy is not a matter, ultimately, to be systematized. He speaks truly, I think, about 'the tragic sense of life'. He describes it as a sub-philosophy, 'more or less formulated, more or less conscious', reaching deep down into temperament, not so much 'flowing from ideas as determining them'. It is the sense of ancient evil, of the mystery of human suffering, of the gulf between aspiration and achievement. It colours the tragic artist's vision of life (his

theoretic form) and gives his works their peculiar shade and tone. It speaks, not the language of systematic thought, but through symbolic action, symbol and figure, diction and image, sound and rhythm. Such a recognition should precede any attempt to talk 'systematically' about tragedy, while not denying the value of the attempt itself.

Two more comments remain to be made about method. The first is the problem of circular evidence,[5] the use of tragedies to define tragedy. I am assuming that we can talk meaningfully about a body of literature which reveals certain generic qualities and which can be distinguished from the body of literature called comedy, epic, satire, or the literature of pathos. My purpose is to isolate these qualities and to refer to the works themselves as illustrations rather than proof.

The second comment involves the problem of affectivism, which is the problem of catharsis: 'This play is a tragedy because it makes me feel thus and so.' As Max Scheler puts it, [348] this method would bring us ultimately to the contemplation of our own ego. Thus, I would reverse the order of F. L. Lucas's discussion, which assumes that we must know what tragedy does before we can tell what it is: 'We cannot fully discuss the means,' Lucas wrote, 'until we are clear about the ends.' It is true that the usual or 'scientific' way is to define natures by effects, which are observable. But rather than found a definition of tragedy on the infinite variables of an audience's reactions, I would consider first the works themselves as the 'effects' and look in them for evidences of an efficient cause: a world-view, a form that 'underlies the forms we merely practice'. What are the generic qualities of these effects? Do they comprise a 'form'? I think they do; and for convenience I shall use the term from the start as if I had already proved its legitimacy.

Basic to the tragic form is its recognition of the inevitability of paradox, of unresolved tensions and ambiguities, of opposites in precarious balance. Like the arch, tragedy never rests—or never comes to rest, with all losses restored and sorrows ended. Problems are put and pressed, but not solved. An occasional 'happy ending', as in *The Oresteia* or *Crime and Punishment,* does not mean a full resolution. Though there may be intermittences, there is no ultimate discharge in the war. Although this suggests formlessness, as it must in contrast with certain types of religious orthodoxy or philosophical system, it would seem the essence of the tragic form. Surely it is more form than chaos. For out of all these tensions and paradoxes, these feelings, intuitions, insights, there emerges a fairly coherent attitude towards the

universe and man. Tragedy makes certain distinguishable and characteristic affirmations, as well as denials, about (I) the cosmos and man's relation to it; (II) the nature of the individual and his relation to himself; (III) the individual in society.

(I) *The tragic cosmos.* In using the term cosmos to signify a theory of the universe and man's relation to it, I have, of course, made a statement about tragedy: that tragedy affirms a cosmos of which man is a meaningful part. To be sure, the characteristic locale of tragedy is not the empyrean. Tragedy is primarily humanistic. Its focus is an event in this world; it is uncommitted [349] as to questions of ultimate destiny, and it is non-religious in its attitude toward revelation. But it speaks, however vaguely or variously, of an order that transcends time, space and matter.[6] It assumes man's connection with some supersensory or supernatural, or metaphysical being or principle, whether it be the Olympians, Job's Jehovah or the Christian God; Fate, Fortune's Wheel, the 'elements' that Lear invoked, or Koestler's 'oceanic sense', which comes in so tentatively (and pathetically) at the end of *Darkness at Noon.* The first thing that tragedy says about the cosmos is that, for good or ill, it is; and in this respect tragedy's theoretic opposite is naturalism or mechanism. Tragedy is witness (secondly) to the cosmic mystery, to the 'wonderful' surrounding our lives; and in literature the opposite of tragedy is not only writing based upon naturalistic theory but also upon the four-square, 'probable' [7] world of satire and rationalistic comedy. Finally, what distinguishes tragedy from other forms which bespeak this cosmic sense—for tragedy of course is not unique in this—is its peculiar and intense preoccupation with the evil in the universe, whatever it is in the stars that compels, harasses, and bears man down. Tragedy wrestles with the evil of the mystery—and the mystery of the evil. And the contest never ends.

But, paradoxically, its view of the cosmos is what sustains tragedy. Tragedy discerns a principle of goodness that coexists with the evil. This principle need be nothing so pat as The Moral Order, the 'armies of unalterable law', and it is nothing so sure as the orthodox Christian God. It is nearer the folk sense that justice exists somewhere in the universe, or what Nietzsche describes as the orgiastic, mystical sense of oneness, of life as 'indestructibly powerful and pleasurable'. It may be a vision of some transcendent beauty and dignity against which the present evil may be seen as evil and the welter as welter. This is what keeps tragedy from giving up the whole human experiment, and in this respect its opposite is not comedy or satire but cynicism and

nihilism, as in Schopenhauer's theory of [350] resignation. The 'problem of the good' plays as vital a part in tragedy as the 'problem of evil'. It provides the living tension without which tragedy ceases to exist.

Thus tragedy contemplates a universe in which man is not the measure of all things. It confronts a mystery. W. Macneile Dixon [8] pointed out that tragedy started as 'an affair with the gods'; and the extent to which literature has become 'secularized and humanized', he wrote, is a sign of its departure from (to use our present term) the tragic form. While agreeing with him as to the tendency, one may question the wholesale verdict which he implies. The affair with the gods has not, in the minds of all our artists, been reduced to an affair with the social order, or the environment, or the glands. But certainly where it becomes so, the muse of tragedy walks out; the universe loses its mystery and (to invoke catharsis for a moment) its terror.

The terms 'pessimism' and 'optimism', in the view of the universe as conceived in the tragic form, do not suggest adequate categories, as Nietzsche first pointed out.[9] Tragedy contains them both, goes beyond both, illuminates both, but comes to no conclusion. Tragedy could, it is true, be called pessimistic in its view of the evil in the universe as unremitting and irremediable, the blight man was born for, the necessary condition of existence. It is pessimistic, also, in its view of the overwhelming proportion of evil to good and in its awareness of the mystery of why this should be—the 'unfathomable element' in which Ahab foundered. But it is optimistic in what might be called its vitalism, which is in some sense mystical, not earth-bound; in its faith in a cosmic good; in its vision, [351] however fleeting, of a world in which all questions could be answered.

(II) *Tragic man.* If the tragic form asserts a cosmos, some order behind the immediate disorder, what does it assert about the nature of man, other than that he is a being capable of cosmic affinities? What is tragic man as he lives and moves on this earth? Can he be distinguished meaningfully from the man of comedy, satire, epic or lyric? How does he differ from 'pathetic man' or 'religious man'? or from man as conceived by the materialistic psychologies? Tragic man shares some qualities, of course, with each of these. I shall stress differences in the appropriate contexts.

Like the cosmos which he views, tragic man is a paradox and a mystery. He is no child of God; yet he feels himself more than a child of earth. He is not the plaything of Fate, but he is not entirely free. He is 'both creature and creator' (in Niebuhr's phrase)—'fatefully

free and freely fated' (in George Schrader's). He recognizes 'the fact of guilt' while cherishing the 'dream of innocence' (Fiedler), and he never fully abandons either position. He is plagued by the ambiguity of his own nature and of the world he lives in. He is torn between the sense in common-sense (which is the norm of satire and rationalistic, or corrective, comedy) and his own uncommon sense. Aware of the just but irreconcilable claims within and without, he is conscious of the immorality of his own morality and suffers in the knowledge of his own recalcitrance.

The dynamic of this recalcitrance is pride. It sustains his belief, however humbled he may become by later experience, in his own freedom, in his innocence, and in his uncommon sense. Tragic man is man at his most prideful and independent, man glorying in his humanity. Tragic pride, like everything else about tragedy, is ambiguous; it can be tainted with arrogance and have its petty side; but it is not to be equated with sin or weakness. The Greeks feared it when it threatened the gods or slipped into arrogance, but they honoured it and even worshipped it in their heroes. It was the common folk, the chorus, who had no pride, or were 'flawless'.[10] The chorus invariably [352] argue against pride, urging caution and moderation, because they know it leads to suffering; but tragedy as such does not prejudge it.

While many of these things, again, might be said of other than tragic man, it is in the peculiar nature of his suffering, and in his capacity for suffering, that his distinguishing quality lies. For instance (to ring changes on the Cartesian formula), tragic man would not define himself, like the man of corrective comedy or satire, 'I think, therefore I am'; nor like the man of achievement (epic): 'I act, or conquer, therefore I am': nor like the man of sensibility (lyric): 'I feel, therefore I am': nor like the religious man: 'I believe, therefore I am'. Although he has all these qualities (of thought, achievement, sensibility, and belief) in various forms and degrees, the essence of his nature is brought out by suffering: 'I suffer, I will to suffer, I learn by suffering; therefore I am.' The classic statement, of course, is Aeschylus's: 'Wisdom comes alone through suffering' (Lattimore's translation); perhaps the most radical is Dostoevski's: 'Suffering is the sole origin of consciousness.' [11]

This is not to say that only tragic man suffers or that he who suffers is tragic. Saints and martyrs suffer and learn by suffering; Odysseus suffered and learned; Dante suffered and learned on his journey with

Virgil. But tragic man, I think, is distinguishable from these others in the nature of his suffering as conditioned by its source and locus, in its characteristic course and consequences (that is, the ultimate disaster and the 'knowledge' it leads to), and in his intense preoccupation with his own suffering.

But to consider these matters in turn and to illustrate them briefly:

I have already suggested the main sources and locus of tragic man's suffering. He suffers because he is more than usually sensitive to the 'terrible disrelations' he sees about him and experiences in himself. He is more than usually aware of the mighty opposites in the universe and in man, of the gulf between desire and fulfilment, between what is and what should be. This kind of suffering is suffering on a high level, beyond [353] the reach of the immature or brutish, and for ever closed to the extreme optimist, the extreme pessimist,[12] or the merely indifferent. It was Job on the ash-heap, the proto-type of tragic man, who was first struck by the incongruity between Jehovah's nature and His actions, between desert and reward in this life; and it was he who first asked, not so much for a release from physical suffering as a reasonable explanation of it. But above all, the source of tragic suffering is the sense, in the consciousness of tragic man, of simultaneous guilt and guiltlessness. Tillich called tragedy 'a mixture of guilt and necessity'. If tragic man could say, 'I sinned, therefore I suffer' or 'He (or They or God) sinned, therefore I suffer', his problem would be resolved, and the peculiar poignancy of his suffering would be removed. If he felt himself entirely free or entirely determined, he would cease to be tragic. But he is neither—he is, in short, a paradox and mystery, the 'riddle of the world'.

To draw further distinctions: The element of guilt in tragic suffering distinguishes it from the pathetic suffering of the guiltless and from the suffering of the sentimentalists's bleeding heart. On the other hand, tragic man's sense of fate, and of the mystery of fate, distinguishes his suffering from the suffering (which is little more than embarrassment) of the man of corrective comedy and satire. The suffering of the epic hero has little of the element of bafflement or enigma; it is not, characteristically, spiritual suffering. The Christian in his suffering can confess total guilt and look to the promise of redemption through grace.[13] The martyr seeks suffering, accepts it gladly, 'glories in tribulation'. Tragic man knows nothing of grace and never glories in his suffering. Although he may come to acquiesce in it partly and 'learn' from it (a stage I shall discuss below), his characteristic mood

is resentment and dogged endurance. He has not the stoic's patience, although this may be part of what he learns. Characteristically, he is restless, intense, probing and questioning the universe and his own soul (Job, Lear, Ahab). It is true that, from Greek tragedy to tragedy written in the Christian era (Shakespeare and beyond) emphasis shifts from [354] the universe to the soul, from the cosmic to the psychological. But Prometheus had an inner life; Antigone, for all her composure, suffered an ultimate doubt; Oedipus suffered spiritually as he grew to understand the dark ambiguities in his own nature. And we should be mistaken if we tried to interpret the divine powers in the plays of Shakespeare simply as 'allegorical symbols for psychological realities'.[14]

Tragic man, then, placed in a universe of irreconcilables, acting in a situation in which he is both innocent and guilty, and peculiarly sensitive to the 'cursed spite' of his condition, suffers. What in the tragic view is the characteristic course of this suffering and what further aspects of tragic man are revealed by it? The tragic form develops, not only the partial outlines of a cosmology and psychology, but of an ethic.

(III) *Tragic man and society.* The tragic sufferer may now be viewed in his social and moral relationships. In the tragic world there are several alternatives. A man can default from the human condition —'Curse God and die'—and bring his suffering to an end: he can endure and be silent; he can turn cynic. Tragic man understands these alternatives, feels their attractions, but chooses a different way. Rising in his pride, he protests: he pits himself in some way against whatever, in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, seems to him to be wrong, oppressive, or personally thwarting. This is the hero's commitment, made early or late, but involving him necessarily in society and in action—with Prometheus and Antigone early, with Hamlet late. What to the orthodox mind would appear to be the wisdom or folly, the goodness or badness, of the commitment is not, in the beginning, the essence of the matter. In the first phase of his course of suffering, the hero's position may be anarchic, individual, romantic. Herein tragedy tests all norms—as, by contrast, satire,[15] comedy, or epic tend to confirm them. The commitment may even be expressed in what society knows as a crime, but, as with tragic pride (of which the commitment is in part the expression) tragedy does not prejudge it. Thus it is said that tragedy studies 'the great offenders', and Dostoevski sought among criminals and outcasts for his greatest spiritual [355]

discoveries. But the commitment must grow in meaning to include the more-than-personal. Ultimately, and ideally, the tragic hero stands as universal man, speaking for all men. The tragic sufferer, emerging from his early stage of lament or rebellion (Job's opening speech; the first scenes of Prometheus; Lear's early bursts of temper), moves beyond the 'intermittences' of his own heart and makes a 'pact with the world that is unremitting and sealed'.[16]

Since the commitment cannot lead in the direction of escape or compromise, it must involve head-on collision with the forces that would oppress or frustrate. Conscious of the ambiguities without and within, which are the source of his peculiar suffering, tragic man accepts the conflict. It is horrible to do it, he says, but it is more horrible to leave it undone. He is now in the main phase of his suffering—the 'passion'.[17]

In his passion he differs from the rebel, who would merely smash; or the romantic hero, who is not conscious of guilt; or the epic hero, who deals with emergencies rather than dilemmas. Odysseus and Aeneas, to be sure, face moral problems, but they proceed in a clear ethical light. Their social norms are secure. But the tragic hero sees a sudden, unexpected evil at the heart of things that infects all things. His secure and settled world has gone wrong, and he must oppose his own ambiguous nature against what he loves. Doing so involves total risk, as the chorus and his friends remind him. He may brood and pause, like Hamlet, or he may proceed with Ahab's fury; but proceed he must.

He proceeds, suffers, and in his suffering 'learns'. This is the phase of 'perception'. Although it often culminates in a single apocalyptic scene, a moment of 'recognition', as in *Oedipus* and *Othello,* it need not be separate in time from the passion phase. Rather, perception is all that can be summed up in the spiritual and moral change that the hero undergoes from first to last and in the similar change wrought by his actions or by his example in those about him. [356]

For the hero, perception may involve an all-but-complete transformation in character, as with Lear and Oedipus; or a gradual development in poise and self-mastery (Prometheus, Hamlet); or the softening and humanizing of the hard outlines of a character like Antigone's. It may appear in the hero's change from moody isolation and self-pity to a sense of his sharing in the general human condition, of his responsibility for it and to it. This was one stage in Lear's pilgrimage ('I have ta'en too little care of this') and as far as Dostoev-

ski's Dmitri Karamazov ever got. In all the manifestations of this perception there is an element of Hamlet's 'readiness', of an acceptance of destiny that is not merely resignation. At its most luminous it is Lear's and Oedipus's hard-won humility and new understanding of love. It may transform or merely inform, but a change there must be.

And it is more, of course, than merely a moral change, just as the hero's problem is always more than a moral one. His affair is still with the gods. In taking up arms against the ancient cosmic evil, he transcends the human situation, mediating between the human and the divine. It was Orestes's suffering that, in the end, made the heavens more just. In the defeat or death which is the usual lot of the tragic hero, he becomes a citizen of a larger city, still defiant but in a new mood, a 'calm of mind', a partial acquiescence. Having at first resented his destiny, he has lived it out, found unexpected meanings in it, carried his case to a more-than-human tribunal. He sees his own destiny, and man's destiny, in its ultimate perspective.

But the perception which completes the tragic form is not dramatized solely through the hero's change, although his pilgrimage provides the traditional tragic structure.[18] The full [357] nature and extent of the new vision is measured also by what happens to the other figures in the total symbolic situation—to the hero's antagonists (King Creon, Cladius, Iago); to his opposites (the trimmers and hangers-on, the Osrics); to his approximates (Ismene, Horatio, Kent, the Chorus). Some he moves, some do not change at all. But his suffering must make a difference somewhere outside himself. After Antigone's death the community (even Creon) re-forms around her; the 'new acquist' at the end of *Samson Agonistes* is the common note, also, at the end of the Shakespearean tragedies. For the lookers-on there is no sudden rending of the veil of clay, no triumphant assertion of The Moral Order. There has been suffering and disaster, ultimate and irredeemable loss, and there is promise of more to come. But all who are involved have been witness to new revelations about human existence, the evil of evil and the goodness of good. They are more 'ready'. The same old paradoxes and ambiguities remain, but for the moment they are transcended in the higher vision. [358]

NOTES

[1] Eleventh edition, article 'Aesthetics'.

[2] 'The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James: Notes on the Under-

lying Classic Form in the Novel', *Accent,* Summer, 1951; see also Eliseo Vivas, 'Literature and Knowledge', *Sewanee Review,* Autumn, 1952.

[3] F. A. Pottle, 'Catharsis', *Yale Review,* Summer, 1951; F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics,* N.Y., 1928; Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper,* N.Y., 1929; Mark Harris, *The Case for Tragedy,* N.Y., 1932.

[4] *The Tragic Sense of Life,* tr. J. E. C. Flitch, London, 1921, pp. 17–18.

[5] Cf. Max Scheler, 'On the Tragic', *Cross Currents,* Winter, 1954. This is a selection from Scheler's *Vom Umsturtz der Werte,* vol. I (1923), tr. Bernard Stambler.

[6] Cf. Susan Taubes, 'The Nature of Tragedy', *Review of Metaphysics,* December 1953.

[7] The 'wonderful' and the 'probable' are the basic categories in Albert Cook's distinction between tragedy and comedy. (*The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean,* Cambridge, Mass., 1949, chap. I.)

[8] *Tragedy,* London, 1924. The extent of my indebtedness to this book, and to the other discussions of tragedy mentioned in this paper, is poorly indicated by such passing references as this. Since observations on tragedy and the theory of tragedy appear in innumerable discussions of particular authors, eras, and related critical problems, a complete list would be far too cumbersome. Among them would be, surely, the standard work of A. C. Bradley and Willard Farnham on Shakespearean tragedy; C. M. Bowra and Cedric Whitman on Sophocles; W. L. Courtney (*The Idea of Tragedy,* London, 1900); Maxwell Anderson, *The Essence of Tragedy,* Washington, 1939; Northrop Frye, 'The Archetypes of Literature', *Kenyon Review,* Winter, 1951; Moody Prior, *The Language of Tragedy,* N.Y., 1947; and Herbert Weisinger, *Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,* Michigan State College Press, 1953, which makes rich use of the archaeological and mythographic studies of the origin of tragedy (Cornford, Harrison, Murray). I am indebted, also, to my colleague Laurence Michel, for frequent conversations and helpful criticism.

[9] See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy,* London, 1938.

[10] Cf. Arthur Miller, 'Tragedy and the Common Man', *New York Times,* February 27th, 1949.

[11] *Notes from Underground,* tr. B. G. Guerney.

[12] Cf. William Van O'Connor, *Climates of Tragedy,* Baton Rouge, La., 1943.

[13] Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy Is Not Enough,* tr. Reiche, Moore, Deutsch; Boston, 1952.

[14] Susan Taubes, *op. cit.,* p. 196.

[15] Cf. Maynard Mack, 'The Muse of Satire', *Yale Review,* Spring, 1952.

[16] Wallace Fowlie, 'Swann and Hamlet: A Note on the Contemporary Hero', *Partisan Review,* 1942.

[17] Cf. Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre,* Princeton, N.J., 1949, chap. I, 'The Tragic Rhythm of Action'. Fergusson translates Kenneth Burke's formulation 'Poiema, Pathema, Mathema' into 'Purpose, Pas-

sion, Perception'. (See *A Grammar of Motives*, pp. 38ff.) Cf. also Susan Taubes, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

[18] Indeed, it has been pointed out that, in an age when the symbol of the hero as the dominating centre of the play seems to have lost its validity with artist and audience, the role is taken over by the artist himself, who is his own tragic hero. That is, 'perception' is conveyed more generally, in the total movement of the piece and through all the parts. The 'pact with the world' and the suffering are not objectified in a hero's ordeal but seem peculiarly the author's. This quality has been noted in joyce's *Ulysses;* Berdiaev saw it in Dostoevski; Hardy, Conrad, Faulkner are examples that come to mind. At any rate, the distinction may be useful in determining matters of tone, although it is not clear cut, as distinctions in tone seldom are. But it is one way of pointing to the difference between the tragic tone and the Olympian distance of Meredithian comedy, the harmony of the final phase of Dantesque comedy, or the ironic detachment of satire. Nietzsche spoke of the difference between the Dionysian (or tragic) artist and 'the poet of the dramatized epos . . . the calm, unmoved embodiment of Contemplation, whose wide eyes see the picture before them.' (*Birth of Tragedy* in *Works,* ed. O. Levy, Edinburgh and London, 1909, III, p. 96.)

Shakespeare's Source

The Story of Othello

GIRALDI CINTHIO

TRANSLATED BY LEONARD F. DEAN AND JOSEPH B. CARY

In Venice there once dwelt a most valorous Moor who, through a combination of conspicuous courage, prudence and lively intelligence in military matters, had endeared himself to his superiors—those who have, from time immemorial, promoted the welfare of the state by the rewarding of excellence. It so happened that a chaste and supremely beautiful lady named Desdemona fell in love with him, moved not by the usual female appetites but by his virtue. And conquered by her beauty and nobility of mind, he likewise became enamoured of her. Love favored them: they were married despite the efforts of her parents to make her take any husband but a Moor. And while in Venice they lived together in such harmony and tranquillity that neither word nor deed was ever less than loving.

Now the rulers of the Republic decided to change the garrison which they normally kept in Cyprus, and appointed the Moor commander of the new troops. While he was most pleased to be the recipient of an honor usually reserved for those of noble rank, wealth, loyalty and demonstrated bravery, nonetheless his joy was diminished by the prospect of a long and arduous voyage and he bethought himself of Desdemona and her pain at being left behind. She, on the other hand, whose sole happiness was in the Moor, was delighted at the testimony paid by the noblest and most powerful of republics to her husband's abilities, and longed for the moment when he would set off with his troops, and herself, for such a distinguished post. Thus his troubled looks made her anxious, and, perplexed as to the cause, one day at table she asked: "Moor, why is it that since you have been given such an honorable appointment by the State you are so melancholy?" To which he answered, "My pleasure at this honor

is overcast by the love I bear you. One of two things must happen: either I expose you to the perils of the sea, or, to spare you that, I leave you in Venice. In the first case, each hardship you might suffer, every danger threatening us, would be torture for me. But the second would be equally hateful: leaving you would be as leaving part of myself." And Desdemona, enlightened, replied: "Ah, my husband, what thoughts are you thinking? Whom do you contemplate leaving? There is nothing here for consternation. I go where you go —through fire if needs be, let alone on a trim, safe ship. If there are really perils and hardships to come, I wish to share them with you. Truly, I would think you had little love for me if you were to leave me in Venice, or were to imagine that I preferred my own safety to danger shared with you. Prepare for the voyage, then, with that vigor which won you your command." At this the Moor joyfully embraced her, and kissing her lovingly, exclaimed: "God keep you long in such love, dearest wife!" In a short while, having made all necessary preparations, he set sail with his wife and troops, and after a smooth crossing arrived in Cyprus.

The Moor had in his company an Ensign who concealed beneath a charming exterior the wickedest nature in the world. This wretch was highly regarded by the Moor, who had no inkling of his depravity; his pernicious heart was cloaked by a manliness and eloquence worthy of Hector or Achilles. Now he too had brought his wife to Cyprus, a beautiful and honorable young woman; being Italian, she was much loved by the Moor's wife and they were much together. In the same company there was also a Captain who, being very dear to the Moor, dined often at the Moor's house with him and his wife. And since Desdemona knew of her husband's affection for him, she treated him with the greatest kindness, and this pleased the Moor highly. The villainous Ensign, concerned not at all for his marriage vows nor for the friendship, allegiance and duty he owed the Moor, fell madly in love with Desdemona, and bent all his mind on how he might enjoy her. Yet he dared not show his passion, fearing that the Moor would see it and kill him. By various subtle means he attempted to reveal his love to Desdemona, but her mind, occupied wholly with the Moor, had no thought for the Ensign or any other. And as all his stratagems proved useless, he fancied that this was so because she was smitten with the Captain, and he considered how he might be rid of him. The love he bore for Desdemona now turned to the most bitter hatred; he began to study how, with the Captain killed, and Des-

demona still proving unattainable, he might prevent the Moor from enjoying her. And having meditated upon various wicked and spiteful alternatives he resolved in the end to accuse her to her husband of adultery and to make him think the Captain was her lover. But well knowing the Moor's unparalleled love for Desdemona and his friendship for the Captain, he knew that it would be impossible to persuade the Moor of the truth of either charge except by means of some ingenious deception. He thus waited for the auspicious time and place to inaugurate his evil enterprise.

It was not long before the Moor had occasion to demote the Captain for having wounded a soldier while on sentry duty. Desdemona was deeply grieved and repeatedly tried to reconcile her husband and the Captain—so much so that the Moor remarked to the villainous Ensign that his wife's urgings in the Captain's behalf made him fear that he would finally have to take him back. This gave the fiend the opportunity to put his schemes into action. "Perhaps," he remarked, "Desdemona has reason to favor him." "Why?" asked the Moor. And the Ensign: "I do not wish to come between husband and wife, but you would see for yourself if you would but open your eyes." And despite the Moor's urging the Ensign refused to say more. Nevertheless, the words were a thorn in the Moor's heart, and he brooded darkly over their possible meaning.

One day, while his wife was attempting to mollify his anger with the Captain, begging him to weigh the years of service and friendship against one small fault, and noting that the wounded soldier and the Captain were already reconciled, the Moor became angry and exclaimed, "Your concern for this man is extraordinary! He is not a brother or kinsman that you should have him so much at heart." The lady answered, humbly and gently, "I would not have you angry with me. I am only distressed at seeing you separated from one who, as you yourself have told me, was a dear friend. He has not committed such a serious crime that you should bear him such hatred. You Moors are so hot-blooded by nature that a little thing moves you to anger and revenge." To these words the Moor replied more angrily than ever, "It will be felt by someone who does not expect it. I will have such vengeance for the wrongs done me that I shall be satisfied." The lady was terrified at these words, and seeing her husband enraged with her for the first time, answered humbly, "Only your own happiness prompted me to speak to you of this, but so you will have no reason to be angry with me, I will speak of it no more."

The Moor assumed that the Ensign's words meant that Desdemona was enamoured of that Captain for whom she had repeatedly petitioned, and in deepest melancholy he went to the scoundrel to persuade him to speak more openly. The Ensign, bent upon the undoing of the poor lady, at first pretended to be loath to say anything that might displease his interrogater, but finally appeared to yield, saying, "I cannot deny that it pains me beyond measure to have to say a thing that will wound you most bitterly. Nevertheless, because you wish it and because of the care I must have for your honor as my lord, I will speak out loyally and satisfy your demand. Know, then, that your lady is discommoded by the Captain's loss of your favor because of the pleasure she takes with him whenever he comes to your house; your blackness quite repels her." These words cut the Moor to the quick. But, to know more (he believed all that the Ensign had already said because of the suspicion planted in his mind), with a fierce look, he said, "I do not know what keeps me from cutting out your insolent tongue for imputing such shame to my lady." And the Ensign: "I did not expect any other reward than this for my loving service, but since I have been led thus far by duty and concern for your honor, I repeat that this is how things stand, and if the lady has, by a show of love, blinded you to what you should have seen, that does not at all disprove what I have said. Indeed the Captain himself has told me about it, as one whose happiness is incomplete unless he confides in another." And he added, "If I had not feared your anger, I would have killed him, when he told me, as he deserved. But since this is what I get for telling you what concerns you more than anyone, I wish I had said nothing. If I had been silent, I would not have incurred your displeasure." The Moor, in anguish, answered, "If you do not make me see with my own eyes what you have told me, be assured I will make you wish that you had been born dumb." "That would have been easy," replied the villain, "while he was coming to your house, but now that you have put him out, and for a trivial cause rather than the crucial one, it will be difficult. However, I believe that he still enjoys Desdemona whenever you give him the chance, although he has to be more cautious now than before he fell out of your favor. Nevertheless, I have not lost hope of being able to make you see what you do not wish to believe." And with those words they parted.

The wretched Moor, pierced to the heart, went home to await the day when the Ensign would make him see the thing which would

make him unhappy forever. The accursed Ensign, on the other hand, was baffled by the problem of the lady's chastity which, as he knew, she guarded so carefully, and which therefore presented an apparently insuperable obstacle to bringing the Moor to believe what he had falsely told him. But after studying the matter, the villain hit on a new plot.

The wife of the Moor, as I have remarked, often went to the home of the Ensign's wife and stayed with her most of the day. The Ensign observed that she sometimes carried with her a handkerchief, finely embroidered in the Moorish fashion, which he knew the Moor had given her and was precious to both of them. He conceived the idea of stealing it from her and using it for her final undoing. He had a three-year-old daughter, much loved by Desdemona, and one day when the unfortunate lady was at this devil's house, he took the child in his arms and gave her to the lady. And while she held her and hugged her, the deceiver, an expert at sleight-of-hand, lifted the handkerchief from her girdle so skilfully that she did not notice it, and then he departed most pleased with himself.

The unsuspecting Desdemona returned to her home, and busy with other matters, did not think of the handkerchief. But a few days later, looking for it and not finding it, she grew fearful that the Moor might ask her about it, as was his wont. Meanwhile, the evil Ensign, choosing a favorite moment, craftily placed the handkerchief in the Captain's bed where it remained undiscovered until the Captain arose and trod upon it on the floor where it had fallen. Unable to imagine how it came to be in his house, but knowing it to be Desdemona's, he wondered how to return it; finally, he waited until the Moor had left his house, and then went to the back door and knocked. One would think that fate collaborated with the Ensign in the death of the unfortunate woman, for at this moment the Moor came back and, hearing the knock, went to the window and yelled angrily, "Who is knocking?" The Captain, hearing the Moor's voice and fearing that he would come down and attack him, ran away without answering. The Moor came downstairs, opened the door, and went out into the street, but could see no one. He went back into the house angrily and asked his wife who had been knocking; the lady answered truthfully that she did not know. The Moor replied, "It appeared to me to be the Captain." "I do not know whether it was the Captain or someone else," she answered. Although burning with rage, the Moor curbed his fury; he did not want to do anything be-

fore talking with the Ensign. He went to him at once, told him what had happened, and asked him to find out all that he could about it from the Captain; the Ensign, pleased with the way things were going, promised to do so. And one day he spoke to the Captain when the Moor was so placed that he could see them conversing together. Then, speaking of everything except the lady, he made the Captain laugh boisterously, and feigning astonishment, suggested by his attitudes and movements of his hands and head that he was hearing something amazing. The Moor, as soon as he saw them part, went up to the Ensign to find out what the Captain had said to him. The Ensign, after allowing himself to be entreated for a long time, finally said to him, "He has hidden nothing from me. He told me that he has enjoyed your wife every time you were away and gave him the opportunity, and that the last time he was with her she made him a present of the handkerchief which you gave her when you were married." The Moor thanked the Ensign, and it now seemed clear to him that if he found that his wife did not have the handkerchief, things were as the Ensign had reported.

One day, therefore, while talking with his wife after they had dined, he asked her for the handkerchief. The poor lady, who had feared such a request, turned fiery red, and to hide her blushes, which the Moor had carefully noted, she ran to a chest and pretended to look for the handkerchief. After hunting for a long time, she said, "I don't know why I can't find it. Perhaps you have it yourself?" "If I had it," he replied, "why would I ask you? But you will be able to look for it at your leisure another time." After he had left, he began to consider how he might kill the lady, and the Captain with her, in such a way that he would not be thought guilty of her death. And since he brooded upon this day and night, the lady inevitably observed that he was not the same toward her as he had been, and she asked him repeatedly, "What is wrong? What upsets you? Why are you once the merriest man in the world, now the most melancholy?" The Moor invented various answers, but she was left no happier. She knew that she had done nothing that would give the Moor cause for concern, but she did fear that they had been so much together that he had tired of her. And occasionally she remarked to the Ensign's wife, "I do not understand the Moor. He used to be full of love for me, but lately he has been another man. I am afraid that I shall become a warning to young people not to marry against their parents' wishes, that Italian girls may learn from my example

not to unite with a man whom God, nature and custom have made a stranger. But as I know he is your husband's good friend and tells him everything, I beg you to say whether you have heard anything from him which might help me." And so saying, she burst into tears. The wife of the Ensign knew everything (for it was she whom her husband had wanted to use in killing the lady, although she would never consent) but she dared not tell anything because of fear of her husband. She said merely, "Be careful not to give your husband any grounds for suspicion, and try to show your love and faithfulness in every possible way." "I am, I do," the lady replied, "but it does no good."

Meanwhile the Moor was making every effort towards proving the very thing he did not want to find true, and he asked the Ensign to arrange a way for him to see the handkerchief in the Captain's possession. Though this was difficult for the villain, he promised nevertheless to use every means to produce the proof. Now the Captain had a woman at home who did wonderful embroidery work on fine linen, and when she saw the handkerchief and learned that it belonged to the Moor's wife and was to be returned to her, she decided to copy it first. And while she was thus employed, the Ensign, noticing that she sat near a window and could be seen by anyone passing by on the street, pointed her out to the Moor who was now made absolutely certain that his most honorable lady was indeed an adulteress. He therefore decided with the Ensign to kill both her and the Captain, and they deliberated on how the deed should be be done. The Moor asked him to kill the Captain, promising his eternal gratitude. But as the Captain was known to be both prudent and courageous, the Ensign at first refused such a diabolical and dangerous undertaking, and was only prevailed upon to try his hand at it by many entreaties and a large sum of money.

This having been decided, the Captain one dark night was leaving the house of a prostitute with whom he customarily diverted himself, when he was accosted in the darkness by the Ensign who, sword in hand, struck at his legs to cut him down. It so happened that the thrust cut him through the right thigh, and as he fell, the Ensign was upon him to finish the killing. But the Captain, being courageous and used to blood and death, drew his sword and, wounded as he was, rose to defend himself, crying out in a loud voice, "Murder!" And as a result, the Ensign, hearing people running up with soldiers who were billeted nearby, fled so as not to be taken, and then turned

around and feigned that he too had been drawn there by the uproar. Joining the crowd, he saw the mutilated leg, and he judged that even if the Captain were then not dead, he would die from the wound; and although this delighted him, he made a great show of paternal grief over the Captain.

By morning the affair was known all over town, and it reached the ears of Desdemona who, being an affectionate creature and not thinking any harm could come of it, showed so much grief that the Moor imagined the worst. He went to find the Ensign, and said to him, "My stupid wife is so overcome by what has happened to the Captain that she is beside herself." "What could you expect," answered the Ensign, "he being her very soul?" "Her soul, is it?" said the Moor, "If I do not tear her soul from her body and rid the world of this corruption, do not call me a man."

And after they had debated inconclusively as to whether the lady should die by poison or by the knife, the Ensign said, "I have thought of a method which will satisfy you and cause no suspicion. It is this: your house is very old and there are many cracks in the ceiling of your bedroom. I propose that we beat Desdemona with a stocking filled with sand until she is dead, and thus there will be no sign of blows. When she is dead, we will pull down part of the ceiling on the lady's head, making it appear that a beam had fallen and killed her. In this way no one will suspect you, everyone judging her death to be an accident."

This brutal plan pleased the Moor, and he waited for an opportune moment. One night when he was in bed with Desdemona, the Ensign, whom he had already hidden in a closet opening into the room, made a noise according to plan, whereupon the Moor inquired of his wife, "Did you hear that noise?" "I heard it," she answered. "Get up," said the Moor, "and see what it is." The unfortunate Desdemona arose, and as soon as she approached the closet, out came the Ensign, strong and nerveless, and struck her a heavy blow across the back with the stocking which he had ready. She fell, immediately, scarcely able to draw breath, but managed in a weak voice to call to the Moor for help. And arising from bed he exclaimed, "Most evil woman, this is the reward for your falseness, this is what comes to those who, counterfeiting love, set horns upon their husbands' heads!" The poor lady, hearing this and feeling that her hour had come (the Ensign having struck her again), called on divine justice to witness her fidelity, the justice of this world having

failed her. And while calling on the Lord to help her, she died beneath a third blow from the faithless Ensign. Then, laying her on the bed and gashing her head, he and the Moor pulled down the ceiling as planned, the Moor crying out for help, that his house was failing. The neighbors came running at the sound and found Desdemona dead on the bed under a beam—a thing pitied by all because of the lady's goodness.

The following day Desdemona was buried and mourned by all the people. But just God, who sees into all souls, did not will that so evil a crime should go without proper punishment. The Moor, whom Desdemona had loved more than life itself, finding himself bereft, began to desire her so much that he searched the length and breadth of the house as though out of his mind. Reflecting that the Ensign was the reason he had lost his lady, and with her all joy in life, and peace of mind, he conceived such hatred for the villain that he could not bear the sight of him; and had he not feared the absolute justice of the Venetian authorities, he would have killed him publicly. But unable to do this with impunity, he stripped him of his rank and dismissed him from the company, and from this arose the greatest and bitterest hatred between the two.

The Ensign, most evil of villains, now concentrated on the downfall of the Moor. He sought out the Captain, who had recovered and went around on a wooden leg in place of the one which had been cut off, and said to him, "It is time you had revenge for your lost leg. If you will come with me to Venice, I will tell you who the guilty one is, a thing I dare not reveal here for many reasons, and I will be your witness." The Captain, his anger returning and in all innocence, thanked the Ensign and went with him to Venice. And there the Ensign informed him that it had been the Moor who had cut off his leg because of his delusion that the Captain had lain with Desdemona, and who for the same reason had murdered her and spread the word that the falling ceiling had killed her. On hearing this, the Captain accused the Moor to the authorities both of having cut off his leg and of having killed his wife, and he called the Ensign as witness. The villain testified that both accusations were true because the Moor had told him everything and had even tried to induce him to commit both crimes, and that having finally killed his wife himself out of bestial and unwarranted jealousy, the Moor had told him of the manner in which he killed her. The authorities, on hearing of this crime by a barbarian against one of their citizens,

had the Moor arrested in Cyprus and brought to Venice, where they tried by torture to wring the truth out of him. He, however, courageously withstood the pain and denied everything so resolutely that nothing could be drawn from him. But although he escaped death through his steadfastness, he was, after many days in prison, condemned to perpetual exile, where he was finally killed by Desdemona's kinsfolk as he deserved.

The Ensign returned to his own country and characteristically accused one of his companions, claiming that he had tried to get him to murder a certain gentleman who was his enemy. The accused denied the accusation under torture whereupon the Ensign was also put to the rack as a means of ascertaining the truth of his charge. And when he had been beaten so much that his body ruptured, he was removed from prison and taken home, where he died miserably. Thus did God avenge the innocence of Desdemona. The Ensign's wife, who knew the facts, narrated these things after his death as I have set them down here.

Suggestions for Study, Discussion, and Writing

THOMAS RYMER—*Othello:* A BLOODY FARCE

Thomas Rymer (1643?–1713) was educated at Cambridge University and in the law at Gray's Inn, London, and he spent much of his life editing the British government's foreign treaties for publication. In 1674, the year after he was admitted to the bar, he began his study of French literary criticism by translating Rapin's *Reflections* on Aristotle. Three years later, in *Tragedies of the Last Age,* he attempted to apply what he had learned to selected Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, and he continued the attempt in *A Short View of Tragedy* (1692). *A Short View* was meant to include critiques of *Othello, Julius Caesar, Catiline,* and *Paradise Lost,* but the bulk of the book is devoted to the attack on *Othello,* most of which is reprinted above.

Macaulay called Rymer the worst critic who ever lived, and many readers have found it simpler to be irritated by Rymer than to answer him. Intentionally or otherwise, he raises some fundamental questions about *Othello,* about tragedy, and about literature in general, as the following questions may help to suggest.

1. The Moral. Rymer's satiric reduction of the moral meaning of *Othello* to a set of prudential maxims raises the problem of what, if anything, the play teaches, and reminds us how difficult it may be to define the moral significance of tragedy. With your own impressions of the play in mind, how would you contend with Rymer's implication that *Othello* is deficient in moral instruction, is in fact amoral? How into such a discussion would you fit the following remark: ". . . the quality of the tragic is lacking when the question 'Who is guilty?' has a clear and definite answer . . . The tragic misdeed is even definable as that which silences all possible moral and legal powers of judg-

ment. . . ." (Max Scheler, "On the Tragic," *Cross Currents,* IV, 1954, p. 187)

2. The Characters. Rymer says that the characters in *Othello* are improbable. By what criteria does he test their probability? How satisfactory do you think his criteria are? How accurately does he apply them? What basic questions about dramatic characterization is Rymer raising, even though he may not be answering them satisfactorily? Discuss the following comment by Rymer's modern editor, Professor Curt Zimansky, on Rymer's complaint that Iago is not a typically simple and honest soldier: ". . . that it is improbable for a soldier to be so coldly calculating, that the very improbability enables Iago to impose on Othello, and that his success depends partly on the idea of the typical soldier that Rymer holds—everyone believes that he has the soldier's qualities of simplicity and forthright honesty. So the very idea of decorum that Rymer upholds is actually in the play, and its violation allows the tragic action."

3. The Time and Place of Action. Running through Rymer's objections to what seems to him improbable characterization is criticism of the shortness of time allowed for the action. Collect and summarize Rymer's statements on this subject. How would you contend with them? What evidence is there in the play for two kinds of time ("Double Time, Short and Long" as it was first called by John Wilson or "Christopher North" in articles in *Blackwood's Magazine,* 1849–50)?

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE—THE MOTIVELESS VILLAIN

Almost all of Coleridge's observations on Shakespeare come from eight lecture courses which he gave from 1809 to 1819. Shakespeare was the central figure in some forty of the ninety-four lectures in the eight courses. What Coleridge said was later pieced together from surviving lecture notes and newspaper and shorthand reports, and this accounts for the disjointed appearance of the remarks on *Othello* reprinted above. Words and phrases bracketed here were added by Raysor for the sake of coherence. Disjointed though they are, Coleridge's observations have been extraordinarily influential, and even though they are now a century and a half old, they are likely to seem quite modern as compared with Rymer's criticism. For example:

1. Rymer and Coleridge on the character of Iago. Rymer finds the character of Iago "intolerable" because we get a "false, insinuating

rascal" instead of the "plain-dealing soldier" demanded by nature and common-sense. Coleridge thinks of Iago as a "preconceiving experimenter," a "passionless character" who uses "moral feelings and qualities only as prudential ends to means." What is the difference between Rymer's "rascal" and Coleridge's "experimenter"? Rymer wanted what he conceived to be a typical soldier. Would it be fair to say simply that Coleridge differs only in wanting and finding a human type rather than an occupational or theatrical type?

2. Rymer and Coleridge on motivation. Coleridge is interested in Iago's motives, urging that he is driven by the "dread of contempt habitual to those who encourage in themselves and have their keenest pleasure in the feeling and expression of contempt for others." This kind of comment is often called the psychological analysis of Character. What appears to be the meaning of "psychological" in such a context? How may Coleridge's interest in Iago's motives be squared with his comment on Iago's soliloquy at the end of Act I that it is "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity"? In this connection why does Coleridge ask us to think of Iago as devilish, but with the careful reservation of "not quite devil"? Is Rymer uninterested in Iago's motives, or does he simply handle motivation in a different way than Coleridge does?

3. Reconsider the foregoing questions on Rymer and Coleridge after reading the selections by Aristotle and Sewall.

WILLIAM HAZLITT—*Othello* AS TRAGEDY AND THE CHARACTER OF IAGO

1. Hazlitt and Coleridge were friends and contemporaries, and it may be expected that their criticism will have much in common. What resemblance, if any, is there between Coleridge's conception of Iago as an "experimenter" and Hazlitt's analysis of Iago's character?

2. How does Hazlitt handle the problem of Iago's motivation?

3. After his opening discussion of the beneficial effects of tragedy in general, Hazlitt goes on to assert that *Othello* is especially effective because the "moral it conveys has a closer application to the concerns of human life than that of almost any other of Shakespear's plays." To what extent will this idea, which seems plausible, stand close inspection? What would Rymer think of it?

G. B. SHAW—*Othello:* PURE MELODRAMA

Shaw wrote about Shakespeare in the forthright style of the practical man of the theater. The essay on *Othello* reprinted above is a review of an actual performance, with a spectator's and playwright's natural stress on acting and staging. It is colored, too, by Shaw's characteristic independence or iconoclasm: he will not be over-awed by "our divine William."

1. One gathers from the opening paragraph that Shaw means "melodrama" to be a derogatory word denoting "superficiality and staginess." In supporting his judgment that *Othello* is pure melodrama, Shaw charges that the characterization of Iago is inconsistent, that "simple" Othello's "words do not convey ideas," that Cassio must produce the impossible effect of "appearing a responsible officer . . . with nothing but a drunken scene to do it in," and so on. Nevertheless, Shaw asserts, "when the worst has been said," the play "remains magnificent by the volume of its passion and the splendor of its word-music," and by the acting skill which may get over the difficulty of Cassio's role and the inconsistencies in Iago. Are there unacknowledged dangers in Shaw's position? Does it commit him, for instance, to an indiscriminate acceptance of theatrical emotionalism? Does it commit him to the assumption that it is wrong to look for more than broad theatrical effects in Shakespeare's plays? May it, on the other hand, help him to see effects that might be underestimated or smoothed over by a literary critic who is primarily interested (like Coleridge? or Hazlitt?) in finding moral themes and psychologically consistent characters?

2. Reconsider the foregoing questions on Shaw after reading the essays on *Othello* on the stage.

A. C. BRADLEY—THE NOBLE OTHELLO

Andrew Cecil Bradley (1851–1935) taught Shakespeare at Liverpool, Glasgow and Oxford, where he became Professor of Poetry in 1901. In 1904 he published material from his courses in the form of ten lectures on Shakespeare's tragedies. The essay reprinted above is a section from the lecture on *Othello*. For nearly half a century Bradley was probably the most influential of Shakespearean critics.

1. Bradley is the fourth critic represented so far in this volume to call Othello "simple." What do Rymer, Coleridge, Shaw, and Bradley mean by "simple" as applied to the character of Othello?

2. Shaw contends that Shakespeare's characters taken moment by moment through a play are likely to be inconsistent, and that if we get an impression of consistency from watching *Othello* it is because of an illusion created by the actors. Would it be fair to say that Bradley ignores or hides the kind of inconsistency which disturbed Shaw, and that he does this by reassembling evidence from various parts of the play into rounded, consistent biographies of the characters? Could Bradley's "illusion" of consistency be in any way like that created by Shaw's actors?

3. How well supported by the play are Bradley's answers, point by point, to those who think it was inexcusable in Othello "to feel any suspicion in his wife at all," and who "blame him for never suspecting Iago or asking him for evidence"?

4. Compare Coleridge, Shaw, and Bradley on the nature of Othello's jealousy, and on the difference between his jealousy and that of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*.

5. After reading the essays on tragedy by Aristotle and Sewall, discuss Bradley's interpretation of *Othello* as tragedy ("But the play is tragedy. . . .").

ELMER EDGAR STOLL—*Othello:* TRAGEDY OF EFFECT

For nearly fifty years in many books and essays, the late Professor Stoll of the University of Minnesota waged a vigorous campaign against what he felt to be the wrong-headed interpretations by critics interested in the psychological analysis of Shakespeare's characters. His first long study of *Othello* appeared in 1915; the passage reprinted above is from an essay nearly thirty years later arguing his case with respect to both *Macbeth* and *Othello*.

1. It has been suggested that Stoll's leading ideas are in effect an expansion of Shaw's. Test the soundness of this suggestion by comparing the basic views of Shaw and Stoll on *Othello* as they are reprinted here.

2. Given his main argument, is it logically necessary for Stoll to take Iago as a "devil in the flesh"?

3. What is the significance and importance of Stoll's contention

that a tragic hero cannot be a man with a grudge, a man with adequate motives in the ordinary sense? Reconsider this question after reading the essays by Aristotle and Sewall. What, if anything, does Stoll's emphasis on the emotional effects created by "steep tragic contrast" ignore which Sewall considers necessary for tragedy?

T. S. ELIOT—THE HERO CHEERING HIMSELF UP

An important part of T. S. Eliot's literary criticism has been, in his own words, "to define and illustrate a point of view toward the Elizabethan drama, which is different from that of the nineteenth century tradition." For this reason he was sympathetic with Stoll's attack on the nineteenth century psychological analysis of Shakespeare's characters. "Mr. Stoll," said Eliot in an essay on *Hamlet,* "performs a service in recalling to our attention the labours of the critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, observing that 'they know less about psychology than more recent Hamlet critics, but they were nearer in spirit to Shakespeare's art. . . .' " And at this point Eliot added in a footnote: "I have never, by the way, seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to *Othello.*" But in the passage reprinted above from the essay entitled "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Eliot departs from Stoll by adopting a modern rather than an older point of view toward Shakespeare. In the opening paragraph of the essay he explains his strategy in this way: "About any one so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong. Whether Truth ultimately prevails is doubtful and has never been proved; but it is certain that nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error . . . If the only way to prove that Shakespeare did not feel and think exactly as people felt and thought in 1815, or in 1860, or in 1880, is to show that he felt and thought as we felt and thought in 1927, then we must accept gratefully that alternative."

1. In remarking that Othello's speech expresses "the greatness in defeat of a noble but erring nature" only if it is "taken on its face value," Eliot prepares the way for a deeper and presumably preferable interpretation of the speech. What, essentially, is that interpretation? In what respects, if any, does it sound modern, 1927 rather than nineteenth century?

2. Eliot realizes that his "deeper" interpretation may sound "subjective and fantastic." How does he try to protect himself?

3. What, does Eliot imply, is the reality from which Othello is trying to escape in his speech?

4. If the reader accepts Eliot's interpretation of Othello's speech, how must he apparently in turn interpret the character of Othello generally?

5. How may one contend with the apparent contradiction between Eliot's interpretation and Bradley's description of the "greater and nobler" Othello of Act V?

6. Reconsider the foregoing after reading the essays by Aristotle and Sewall. Would it be accurate to say that Eliot's idea of "Christian humility" (which he defines as the opposite of the stoical attitude) corresponds to what Sewall means by tragic insight, "a moment of 'recognition', as in *Oedipus* and *Othello*"? Does Eliot's reading deny to Othello the status of tragic hero, and turn the play into what has been called ironic drama, one in which the emphasis is on the psychological or social causes of the hero's fall, as in Isben or the modern problem play generally? (On ironic and related forms of drama, see Northrop Frye, "A Conspectus of Dramatic Genres," *Kenyon Review*, XIII, 1951, pp. 543–562.)

LEO KIRSCHBAUM—THE MODERN *Othello*

Professor Leo Kirschbaum of Wayne State University has written widely on Elizabethan and Shakespearean critical and textual problems. The essay reprinted above is particularly interesting because in it Kirschbaum frequently defines his own reading by reference to Stoll and Eliot.

1. Would it be fair to say that Kirschbaum accepts Eliot's reading of the character of Othello and extends it? If so, in what direction?

2. How does Kirschbaum support his conviction that Stoll is wrong in holding that Othello's belief in Iago is not grounded in Othello's character but is simply a dramatic device to secure emotional effect?

3. One of Kirschbaum's supporting arguments is the contrast to Othello "in the rejoinders of Roderigo, Cassio and Emilia to the proposal that Desdemona is unchaste. . . ." Are the four examples perfectly parallel?

4. Kirschbaum remarks that the "modern Othello" is described as "always thoroughly noble—before, during, and after his downfall." Is that an accurate report of Coleridge and Bradley on Othello?

5. Kirschbaum asserts that Othello can be a tragic protagonist only if he is a responsible agent rather than the "innocent" victim of a devil-man, Iago. In order to make Othello responsible, Kirschbaum interprets him as a person characterized by "emotional polarity," swinging from over-trust to under-trust. Is that interpretation adequately supported by the play? Is the status of the play as a tragedy endangered by interpreting Othello as an abnormally unstable character? Does Kirschbaum recognize the possibility of such a danger and attempt to guard against it?

6. Would it be fair to conclude from Kirschbaum's criticism of Stoll that any discussion of character must reflect a "psychology," even when it comes from as strong an opponent of the "psychologizers" as Stoll himself?

W. M. T. NOWOTTNY—JUSTICE AND LOVE IN *Othello*

1. Mrs. Nowottny, a British scholar and critic, avoids the debate as to whether "sufficient reason is made out for Othello's believing Iago." She does this by suggesting that the play tells us that jealousy and love are not ultimately matters of reason or evidence, and that Othello's only possible defense against Iago and jealousy is a simple act of faith in Desdemona and love. What elements in the play supply the best support for her reading?

2. In the course of defending her reading she refers to the facts of Othello's race and strange background, and to his insistence on the mystical nature or importance of the handkerchief. How does she interpret those facts for her purpose? Other critics in this volume interpret these matters differently. Are the differing interpretations contradictory or complementary?

3. In her discussion of Act IV, Mrs. Nowottny insists as strongly as do Shaw or Stoll (to name only two others) on its powerful, almost intolerable emotional effects. She traces those effects to the radical change taking place in Othello's personality as he passes from belief to disbelief in Desdemona, and she finds that the most powerful theatrical moments (such as the striking of Desdemona) are expres-

sions of Othello's blind efforts to find some release from his agony. How do you imagine Shaw and Stoll would respond to Mrs. Nowottny's interpretation at this point? Does she relieve us from the necessity of thinking of the character of Othello as psychologically flawed in the manner described by Kirschbaum and others?

4. What is the relationship between Eliot's description of Othello's cheering himself up and Mrs. Nowottny's interpretation of Othello's behavior in her final paragraph?

ROBERT B. HEILMAN—*Othello:* THE UNHEROIC TRAGIC HERO

This essay has been assembled with the author's help from his book-length study of *Othello*. In the notes to that volume, for which there was not room here, Professor Heilman (of the University of Washington) relates his discussion to other critical interpretations, including most of those reprinted here. Among his many publications is another full-scale study of a single Shakespearean play, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear* (1948).

1. The title invented and supplied for Heilman's essay was meant to point toward its central argument. Do you think that it does so accurately? Or would it be fairer, for example, to urge that Heilman's real purpose is to show that the play presents a complex hero rather than one who is simply unheroic? One kind of evidence for such a possibility would be the extent to which Heilman absorbs partial or specialized interpretations and makes them parts of a larger whole. His references to Othello's showmanship recall Eliot, for example, and his remarks on justice recall Mrs. Nowottny. Are there other such examples? What happens to them when they are absorbed into Heilman's interpretation?

2. The crucial test of Heilman's reading will presumably be the way it contends with characterizations which picture Othello as simple, noble, and tragic. How does Heilman manage this, as, for example, in his observation: ". . . it is just this complete judicial review of the case which leads at last to the hero's self-recognition in error (discovery of his 'mistake' if not complete discovery of himself) that distinguishes tragedy from the brute disaster that impinges only on the beholder"? How important is Heilman's parenthesis in the foregoing quotation?

ARTHUR COLBY SPRAGUE—EDMUND KEAN AS OTHELLO EDWIN BOOTH AS IAGO

Professor Sprague of Bryn Mawr College is a leading authority on the history of the stage business in Shakespeare's plays. His earlier book, *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business in His Plays, 1660–1905* (Harvard, 1944), contains an interesting forty-page chapter on *Othello*.

Edmund Kean (1789?–1833) and Edwin Booth (1833–1893) were two of the most famous nineteenth-century Shakespearean actors, and the essays by Sprague reprinted here describe their performances in the leading roles in *Othello*. Sprague also provides the following brief biographical sketches of the two actors:

Kean's parentage and the date of his birth have not yet been established beyond doubt. His mother was pretty certainly a disreputable minor actress named Ann Carey. He acted and recited while still a child; played small parts at the Haymarket in 1806; then endured years of hardship as a struggling performer in the provinces. His chance came at last when he appeared as Shylock at Drury Lane, January 26, 1814, one of the great nights in the history of the English stage. He continued to act, insofar as dissipation and attendant illness permitted, until the end of his life. He visited America in 1820–21 and again in 1825–26.

Edwin Booth, born in Belair, Maryland, was the son of Kean's sometime rival, Junius Brutus Booth. He began to act early. After his father's death, he played for a time in Australia and California. In 1857 his Sir Giles Overreach was acclaimed in Boston, and in 1860 he more than held his own in competition with Edwin Forrest in New York. In 1861 he acted in England. After retiring from the stage upon the assassination of Lincoln by his younger brother, John Wilkes Booth, he was persuaded to return, and in 1869 opened a theater of his own, in New York, which failed, however, in 1873. His second English visit of 1880–1881, was followed by one to Germany, two years later. He made his last appearance in 1891.

Sprague reminds us in his Introduction that stage business may be of several kinds. First, action may be called for by the lines themselves, and what the actor does physically may therefore be defined quite specifically, even though there is no stage direction. Secondly, though the lines demand some action, there may be reasonable doubt as to its precise nature. Thirdly, there may be "business out of keeping with the plain meaning of what Shakespeare wrote—business

momentarily effective it may be, but perverse or meretricious none the less. Fechter's gazing in a mirror at his own blackened face, while speaking Othello's 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,' is a case in point; or for an awful example of quite recent date, Miss Bankhead's standing, as Cleopatra, while she applied the asps, then plunging forward to a sprawling, unlovely death!" It is obvious, in short, that the acting of a play is to a considerable extent a critical interpretation of it. Even when we disagree with the interpretation offered by a particular style of acting, directing, or producing, we often find that we are made conscious of problems and opportunities that escaped us as readers. There is the further possibility that some of the printed criticism of a play like *Othello* may be a reaction to a production rather than to the text. The following questions are among those which may follow from the foregoing line of thought.

1. The account of Kean's portrayal of Othello stresses, among other things, his tendency to save himself for certain scenes and moments, his inability to manage long narrative speeches, his musician-like control of voice, his relative "quietness" in the last scenes, and the realism of his dying fall. Although as Keats and others remarked, Kean gave the impression of ignoring an over-all conception of character in favor of moments of powerful emotion, this in itself may be thought of as being an over-all interpretation. What support or echo is there from the critics for Kean's "disjointed" portrayal? Does it appear, for example, that Kean gave a performance that would be approved by Shaw? by Bradley? by Stoll? by Mrs. Nowottny? To what extent does Kean's implied interpretation agree with your own?

2. We learn that Booth departed from the stagy villainous Iago and created a character who was lithe, graceful, genial, and as infinitely adaptable as an actor to changing audiences or situations. To what extent has this characterization been supported by the critics in this volume? What is the relevance of the suggestion that Booth's physical limitations had some bearing on the way he played the role?

3. We learn also that Booth's impersonation was colored in later years by an increasing emphasis on the baleful, fiendish, and satanic. What is your opinion of the stage business accompanying this change (and its implied interpretation), including the final scene when Booth-Iago stands "with a malignant smile" over the body of Othello?

4. Discuss the effectiveness and appropriateness of other pieces of

stage business used by Booth, including the contrast between Irving's practice of eating grapes and Booth's very different behavior while watching Cassio and Desdemona.

5. What appear to be the major differences between Kean's and Booth's styles of acting and interpreting the play. How do they compare and contrast with modern styles?

MARGARET WEBSTER—PRODUCING *Othello*

Many readers of this book will be acquainted with the name of Margaret Webster. She was born in New York in 1905 when her father and mother (Dame May Whitty) were acting in this country. She made her own acting debut in London as Gentlewoman in John Barrymore's *Hamlet,* later toured the provinces with Sir Philip Ben Greet's Shakespearean company, played for several seasons at London's Old Vic, and in the middle thirties began, with Maurice Evans, her career of producing Shakespeare in this country which has made her well known to university and other audiences.

1. It is evident that Margaret Webster, unlike some nineteenth-century actors and producers, is a student of Shakespearean criticism. We look forward chiefly, however, to learning from her experience as an actress and producer. What insights does she contribute from that experience? To what extent do they alter or confirm the insights of the critics in this volume and your own interpretations?

RICHARD DAVID—*Othello* AT STRATFORD, ENGLAND, 1956

This review of a recent production of *Othello* suggests how an intelligent company can complement criticism by building on its insights and helping to solve its problems. Here are examples:

1. This production faced up to the problems associated with the idea of "double time." How did it try to solve them?

2. A related problem, discussed by many critics and evident in the accounts of Kean's performance, is how to combine moments of theatrical intensity with a sense of continuity and consistency, especially in the character of Othello. What does this production contribute to the solution of that problem? In this connection, it is becoming evident that producers and actors find it useful to emphasize

Othello's race and color. Why? What apparently was the precise point of the emphasis on race and color in this production? Do you feel that the text justifies it?

3. To what extent does Emlyn William's Iago correspond to Coleridge's? to Booth's? What is made of Iago's youthfulness? What is suggested by the contrast which Williams emphasized between Iago's regular speeches and his soliloquies? Does the contrast suggest, for example, the satanic element stressed by Booth and several critics?

ARISTOTLE—TRAGEDY FROM THE *Poetics*
RICHARD B. SEWALL—THE TRAGIC FORM

Running through the criticism of *Othello* is this question: What kind of play is it? A tragedy? A melodrama? A racial or domestic problem play? Since the question is apparently inevitable, and needs to be handled carefully, two essays on the general characteristics of tragedy have been reprinted here. Obviously nothing is to be gained by the merely mechanical sorting of plays into kinds—tragedies, comedies, and so on. It should be fair to hope, however, that questions suggested by the main points in these essays on tragedy may be usefully asked about *Othello* as one tries to discover its shape or form. This approach resembles the familiar critical procedure of comparing two plays, except that in this instance *Othello* is being compared not to another specific play but to a general "play" called tragedy.

The discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics* of Aristotle (384 B.C.–322 B.C.) is a part of his philosophical system and at the same time a generalized description of the essential features of certain Greek plays, particularly Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. An initial problem is how Aristotle's essay can be usefully related to a play like *Othello* written in another country nearly two thousand years later. Professor Sewall (of Yale University) is aware of this general problem in his essay on tragic form. To help solve it, he accepts a distinction between the "theoretic" form of tragedy in general and the "technical" or "executive" form of particular tragedies, and he further assumes a "life-giving relationship," a "wooing both ways" between the two which occurs when a dramatist in any time or place rekindles (executes) the traditional (theoretic) form of tragedy with his unique talent and the particulars of his own experience.

1. With the foregoing remarks in mind, try to phrase questions from Aristotle's essay which may be sensibly applied to *Othello*. Some of them will obviously arise from Aristotle's discussion of plot or fable and the character of the protagonist. Is there anything in Aristotle which bears on Iago?

2. To what extent does this generalization from Sewall's essay apply to Othello: ". . . the tragic hero sees a sudden, unexpected evil at the heart of things that infects all things. His secure and settled world has gone wrong, and he must oppose his own ambiguous nature against what he loves"?

3. Sewall remarks that the tragic protagonist is distinguished by the fact that he learns through suffering, and that his insight may culminate "in a single apocalyptic scene, a moment of 'recognition,' as in *Oedipus* and *Othello.*" What, if anything, does Othello learn through suffering? How, or to what extent, has this question been answered by the critics in this volume?

4. Sewall concludes by observing that the tragic protagonist's insight is "measured also by what happens to the other figures . . . his suffering must make a difference outside himself." In what respects, if any, is this characteristic of tragedy present in *Othello?*

GIRALDI CINTHIO—SHAKESPEARE'S SOURCE: THE STORY OF OTHELLO

It is assumed that Shakespeare got his plot, directly or indirectly, from the story of Othello in the *Hecatommithi* (The Hundred Tales) by Giraldi Cinthio (1504–1573), a minor Italian writer and professor of rhetoric. The story was available to Shakespeare in Cinthio's original Italian (1565), and in a French translation, and the similarities between story and play are obvious. (The new English translation printed here follows the Italian closely in order to give an impression of Cinthio's style and narrative technique.) Although Shakespeare may not have worked directly from the story, and although the play in any event is of course far more than a dramatization of the story, a comparison of the two, if done with intelligence and sensitivity, can throw light on Shakespeare's workmanship and on the meaning of his play. Behind the similarity between story and play there are differences of several general kinds which the reader should consider. For example:

1. Differences of a necessarily technical nature between drama and narrative. Why did Shakespeare add Roderigo to the cast?

2. Minor differences of emphasis and proportion. In his second paragraph, Cinthio chose to dwell on the conflict between love and duty when Othello is ordered to Cyprus. How does Shakespeare handle this?

3. Major differences in characterization and theme. Striking examples are Iago's motives, the manner of Desdemona's death, and the conclusion.

TOPICS FOR WRITING

Anyone who has read the essays in this book, discussed them in connection with the suggestions for study, and taken notes as he went along will already in effect have several substantial papers roughed out. Among the topics which nearly all of the critics have discussed from one angle or another are (1) Othello's race and background, (2) the significance of Othello's final scene and the way it should be acted, (3) the character and motives of Iago and his role in the thematic structure of the play, and (4) the problem of time.

It is possible, also, to work out from this book toward other suitable topics for long papers. The Variorum edition provides a convenient start on older criticism of the play. The annual bibliographies in *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (*PMLA*) and *Shakespeare Quarterly* (*SQ*) list over the years scores of critical and scholarly essays which supplement those reprinted here and which open up additional topics.

Students interested in the theater may find it difficult to get at material on nineteenth-century productions of *Othello,* but recent performances are reviewed in the leading newspapers and theater journals and in *Shakespeare Survey* and the *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Information from those sources can be combined with studies of the Elizabethan and modern stages for papers on changing styles in acting and producing and their bearing on the interpretation of *Othello.*

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